Nursery workers' narratives:

what makes a 'good' nursery worker?

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Abstract

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is a complex field of study. This research explores the creation of an understanding of the ways in which the concept of 'good' nursery workers is constructed in the current political, economic and societal context in England. It discusses the findings of a qualitative narrative study which investigates how 'good' practice is understood by nursery workers who directly work or have worked with babies and young children. In order to find out what nursery workers think, know and feel about 'good' practice, twenty-two nursery workers from a wide range of nursery settings were interviewed.

The rationale for the research was that by exploring experiences of nursery workers, a deeper understanding is provided of what they think 'good' nursery practice is, thus adding to the literature in this area, while simultaneously contributing to discussion around professionalisation of the ECEC workforce. The study presents insights into experiences of working with children within a feminist approach that facilitate the emergence of three themes. Each theme is presented in a separate chapter: the relationship between the nursery worker and policy; the close link between maternal discourses and formation of good practice; and the emotional labour involved in working with children.

This research highlights the impact of policies on nursery practices, societal lack of recognition of the ECEC workforce as professionals and the emotional investment of nursery workers when working not just with children but also with their families. The study also reveals the commitment and passion of nursery workers' and their 'love' towards the children. It thus unsettles the notions of nursery workers as 'technicists' and as 'substitute mothers', and also calls attention to the complexities of nursery work in contemporary England.

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Relevant recent publications by the candidate

Mikuska, E. (2020) *The Hidden Impact of Policy Requirement on Nursery Workers in England*. BERA Annual Conference 2020. University of Liverpool, 8-10th September.

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Acronyms

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CWDC	Children Workforce Development Council
DfE	Department for Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status
EYP	Early Years Professional
EYT	Early Years Teacher
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership

Glossary

BERA - British Educational Research Association

BERA is a membership association and learned society, committed to advancing research quality, building research capacity and fostering research engagement. BERA aims to inform the development of policy and practice by promoting the best quality evidence produced by educational research (sourced https://www.bera.ac.uk/)

CWDC - Children Workforce Development Council

The CWDC was responsible for ensuring that people working with children had the appropriate and necessary skills. It was set up by the Labour Government (1997 – 2010) and was closed in 2012. The CWDC was tasked to implement Early Years Professional Status.

DfE - Department for Education

Government department under the Coalition (2010 – 2015) and Conservative Governments (2015 onwards). Its remit is children's services and education across the age phases including early years, primary and secondary school, higher and further education and apprenticeships.

ECEC - Early Childhood Education and Care

This term covers professional practice with young children in pre-compulsory education. In the UK, this is primarily focused on private, voluntary, independent (PVI) and school providers and covers the age ranges birth to five (or the end of the Reception year in primary schools).

EYFS - Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets standards for the learning, development and care of the child from birth to 5 years old. All schools and Ofsted-registered early years providers must follow the EYFS, including childminders, preschools, nurseries and school reception classes in England. The framework was originally implemented in 2008 and has since had two revisions in 2014 and in 2017.

EYPS - Early Years Professional Status

The status awarded to all who had completed a recognised training programme and met the required standards set by the government. Anyone with the EYP status was promoted as a change agent to upskill the workforce and to support the implementation of the then new EYFS. The first EYP's were accredited in 2006 and the programme ceased in 2012 when it became the Early Years Initial Teacher Training.

EYP - Early Years Professional

This term relates to a post-graduate accreditation for working with children between the age ranges of birth to five.

EYT - Early Years Teacher

Early Years Professional accreditation was replaced with YET, and was implemented from September 2012. This is a post-graduate accreditation for those who want to teach in the age ranges of birth to five. Graduates need to meet the eight Teachers' Standards (Early Years) and attend practice placements in compulsory education (primary key stages 1 and 2).

Ofsted - Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

Ofsted is a non-ministerial department which inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages.

NCTL - National College for Teaching and Leadership

Government executive agency currently sponsored by the DfE which is tasked with developing and recruiting a suitable, trained workforce to deliver across the age phases of Early Years, Primary and Secondary schools.

Chapter 1: Introduction and context

1.1 Research focus

This study is about the creation of an understanding of the ways in which 'good' nursery workers are constructed in the current political, economic and societal context in England. Care lies at heart of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). However, the nature and status of this care has been the subject of both discomfort and contestation. In considering the low paid nature of nursery work, there have been widely circulating discourses about the low-skilled nature of early years provision. Thus Moss (2006; 2017) argued that ECEC has at times been designated as less valuable and less important than formal schooling. Efforts to elevate the status of early years provision have been pursued through the addition of the seemingly more important element of education to childcare. Evidence about the importance of the child's first 1000 days has been mobilized to advocate for increased attention to early years provision in England (Edwards et al., 2015). In the context of austerity measures in England, following the election of the Conservative/Liberal Coalition in 2010, policy goals changed such that expenditure on 'childcare' has been justified by reference to promoting mothers' employment above all. This meant that much more emphasis was placed on early years provision by larger, for-profit childcare providers (Lloyd and Penn, 2014). As a result, little impact has been made on the pursuit of the professionalisation of the ECEC workers' agenda in order to raise the social status of the nursery workers. Despite the focus on quality provision, nursery workers professional identities, and on the relationship between education and care (Bennett, 2003), the issue of low pay, working conditions in which nursery workers operate remain (Moss, 2019).

Therefore, this thesis discusses the findings of a qualitative narrative study which sets out to investigate how 'good' practice is understood by nursery workers who directly work or have worked with babies and young children. It also examines how statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Sage (DfE, 2014a) shape their practices. To find out what nursery workers think, understand, and feel about 'good' practice, the experiences of 22 nursery workers were ascertained through the use of a qualitative approach to research. This involved 15 different children's centres and private nurseries in the south-east of England.

The present study sought to contribute new understandings to the existing literature by exploring how nursery workers' understandings of 'good practice' might be shaped by their personal experiences, and dominant discourses of professionalism and professionalisation of the workforce. This first chapter introduces the key concepts of the study and provides a context for early years provision and nursery workers in England.

1.2 Context, participants and terminology

The context in which this thesis was written addresses the three structural dimensions of the ECEC workforce in England namely its organisation, material conditions, and composition. These dimensions are closely interwoven; for example, the organisation of the workforce reflects the split between 'childcare' and 'early education', which goes back to the origins of formal, centre-based early childhood services in the nineteenth century (Moss, 2006; Bennett, 2003). In most cases, this split between 'childcare for working parents' and 'education for over threes' is not only conceptual, such as how deeply it is embedded in the public, but also structural, with divided government responsibility, separate policies, different services with different purposes, principles and values, and a split workforce. This involves teachers working in school-based 'early education' and 'nursery workers' working in non-school centres such as children centres or nurseries. There is a clear line between the two workforces: teachers and nursery workers. This is signified by the different type of work and also a difference in material conditions. Typically, 'childcare workers' compared with teachers have lower levels of educational qualification, pay and other employment conditions (Moss, 2006; 2019). When it comes to the compositional structure of the ECEC workforce, the teacher/nursery worker difference is less apparent as both groups are overwhelmingly female.

The focus of this thesis is to address these structural dimensions, and on the critical interrogation of the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2014a; 2017a) framework, as its publication in 2008 was a significant milestone in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in England. By investigating the EYFS, the study provides a space for a wider conversation around the purpose of ECEC and how this is enacted. To facilitate this, the research focus was on a range of nursery workers' stories as through their lived experiences it was possible to broaden the debates around democracy and the problematisation of a gendered nature of the ECEC work, school readiness and ECEC practices in England.

Since this document is statutory, it is under continuous scrutiny, with ongoing amendments imposed by the government; this has had a major impact on the ways in which a good nursery work(er) is constituted. These changes are outlined, and debates about the professionalisation of the workforce are considered, as they are closely linked to the construction of good nursery work. The concern is how central government policies set out to influence outcomes for children at local level which in turn is relate to the ways in which nursery workers' (good) practice is shaped.

When researching those who work in nurseries, the decision to focus on individuals with diverse educational levels, roles and experiences was paramount; by exploring their narratives, better arguments around an understanding of 'good' practice are likely. Although the class division in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector is an important factor, for example, private sector nurseries are principally the preserve of relatively wealthy fee-paying middle-class parents whilst children's centres tend to be located within the heart of less affluent communities and often involve parent/mother-volunteers (Osgood, 2012), there have been a number of authors who have conceptualised class in the context of culture, lifestyle, and choice of childcare in the UK. Some authors, such as Ball (2003), Byrne (2006), Reay (2001), Skeggs (1997; 2003), and Vincent and Ball (2006) have argued along similar lines to Reay and Ball (1997: 90), that '*assumptions which take middle-class experience to be normative*' equate to the idea that working-class parents are '*ill-informed and less or inappropriately involved in their children's education*'. The main aim of this study is not to explore the class divisions through which the nursery worker is marginalised; it is beyond the scope of this thesis. The main aim of the study is to analyse how relevant policy, education levels, gender, and experiences form the construction of the 'good' nursery worker.

For this research, the focus was on the 2014 version of the EYFS as this version was in circulation at the time the data were collected. The current EYFS statutory framework has been in effect since 3 April 2017, following updates to the 2014 statutory framework. The main changes are around clarity of relevant qualifications such as staff who hold an Early Years Educator qualification must also hold a level 2 English and Mathematics qualification, and the inclusion of the new paediatric first aid (PFA) training requirements. All newly qualified entrants to the early years workforce with a level 2 or 3 qualification must also have either a full or emergency PFA certificate within three months of starting work.

The term ‘nursery’ is used generically throughout the thesis to refer to a setting in which children aged between 0 - 5 years receive education and care away from the home in a regulated provision. The term ‘nursery worker’ is used to refer to someone who works within a nursery. The use of the title ‘nursery worker’ instead of ‘employee’ is deliberate in this study as the generic name for participants of ‘nursery worker’ covers paid or unpaid work / employment status, all kinds and levels of qualifications, gender, and age of the nursery workers.

1.3 Early Childhood Education and Care in England: policy context

To provide a background to this study, a brief historical account of government policy towards the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce is recounted. This seeks to illustrate the changing policy that has contributed to the shaping of the ECEC, and which informs the practice in the nursery environment. Thus it assists with understanding how nursery workers are constructed by the government in England and conceptualises the current trends in policy documentation within the political context in England. It can be argued that the continuous change presents possible benefits for enhancing the professional recognition of the nursery worker. However, the fluid policy environment also gives rise to confusion for nursery workers’ professional practice.

The unparalleled attention of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, nursery places and choices has roots from when mothers’ participation in the labour market increased in the Second World War. At this time, nursery places were expanded, due to the demands of the war economy, which meant that old prejudices about what females could and should do were cast aside in the name of patriotism (Enoch, 2012). Consequently, the situation in which mothers found themselves resulted in them having less time to look after their children. This approach was strengthened in the 1990s, when there was a drive to get more mothers to return to the workforce in England (DfES, 2007). As a result, there has been a rapid expansion of nursery provision which, when coupled with revised curricula developments (DfE, 2014a; 2017a), has highlighted a need for a larger and more highly skilled ECEC workforce to deal with changing demands.

Under the New Labour Government (from 1997 to 2010), ECEC services continued to receive attention in England. In the period 1997 – 2010, two influential pieces of research were completed which impacted upon ECEC. The first of these was the Effective Provision of Pre School Education (EPPE) Project (conducted from 1997 to 2004), the

largest European '*longitudinal investigation into the effects of pre-school education and care*' (Sylva et al., 2003: 1). This aimed to measure the effectiveness of the pre-school on a wide range of children from different backgrounds and to identify which characteristics of pre-schools made them 'effective'.

The second piece of research was 'Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY)', which was commissioned by the DfES in 2002 (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) and was based on the EPPE data set. It was developed to explore the pedagogical strategies which enable learning to take place. The research showed that there were concerns about transitions between nurseries and schools, and that in those settings where there was '*continuity of learning between the setting and the home'*, the cognitive outcomes for the children were considerably better (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002:15).

To support practitioners working with children, several government documents were developed such as the National Childcare Strategy (DfES, 2005; 2007), the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA/DfEE, 2000), which focused on 3 to 5 year old children, and the Birth to Three Matters (DfES, 2002), which covered 0 to 3 year old children. These constituted a major step towards the recognition of the workforce; by creating two frameworks the division between 0-3 and 3-5 year old children was formalised. In addition to this guidance, nurseries had to follow the Full Day Care National Standards for Under 8s Day Care and Childminding (DfES, 2003). This document (known as 'the red book') detailed 14 standards and represented '*a baseline of quality below which no provider may fall*' (DfES, 2003: 1). Consequently, at that time, practitioners working with children from birth to 5 years were expected to work under these three different frameworks – Birth to Three Matters, the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, and the Full Day Care National Standards for Day Care and Childminding. To bring together all aspects of early education and childcare policies and to bridge the gap between the 0-3 and 3-5 years old, and between the ECEC and school education, in 2007 the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework was created (Miller, 2008). This framework incorporated the Birth to Three Matters, Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage and the Full Day Care National Standards for Day Care and Childminding (DfES, 2008). The results of the EPPE (Sylva t al., 2003) and REPEY (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) studies were also reflected in the EYFS (DfE, 2014a). The combination of care and education comes from the EPPE, while the 'school-readiness' concept comes from the REPEY report. Instead of purely educational learning

goals, the EYFS also stipulates the importance of attachment, incorporating a statutory key person approach, and an imperative that '*no child gets left behind*' (DfE, 2014a: 2).

1.4 The purpose of a feminist framework within a narrative approach to research

Weedon (1997) suggested that research that is carried out from a feminist perspective addresses a number of issues that 'traditional' research might not consider. Feminist theory considers biological determinism (Connell, 1987), and gendered inequalities (Davis and Gannon, 2006). Fraser and Nicholson (1990: 5) claimed that 'feminism provides a basis for avoiding a tendency to construct a theory that generalises from the experiences of Western, white, middle class women'. Therefore a feminist framework fits the analysis of the concept of care and nursery work, since it can illuminate the experiences of nursery workers who are mostly female. Fraser and Nicholson (1990: 5) further argued that feminists around the world seek to engage with gender-based relations of 'political, institutional and personal sites where the effects of gendered knowledge and practices are lived as inequalities'. By doing so, the dominant beliefs in ECEC can be disrupted, such as it is 'natural' for women to work with children, or seeing nursery work as an extension of motherhood. Additionally, using feminist theory in Early Childhood Education and Care, attention can be paid to the need to examine how young children are cared for and educated about gender and equality.

From data collection to data analysis and interpretation the process by which this current research was conducted centralised the relationship between the researcher and researched in order to balance differing levels of power and possible authority. The power relationship between the researcher and the research is further explained in the methodology chapter (see section 3.5). Due to the nature of the work, which can be compared with mothers' labour, feminism can give voice to nursery workers through their experiences. Within this framework, a narrative approach to research was well suited as a way of investigating how nursery workers' discourses of 'good' practice in ECEC were related to their lived experiences and understandings of self and other. Andrews (2014: 8) stated that a narrative approach is 'a way of exploring the complexity of how the 'other' is constructed'. For example, how and what one perceives and understands about one's own life is, most of the time, connected to one's view of others. Who am I invariably invites the question of who are 'they' (or other). Employing a narrative approach enabled the study to contribute to Osgood's (2012) research which explored narratives from the

nursery, with the particular focus on the ways in which nursery workers understand and negotiate their professional identities in early childhood. Not only rich and varied experiences of people can be collected in their social context but, as Butch and Staller (2014) suggested, the emotive and personal language can be captured. Even when nursery workers' role sounds familiar for many, there is a possibility to analyse and present aspects of their every-day life that challenges common sense ideas about these people, and about the places they work.

A narrative approach (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008) is particularly relevant for this research, in which narratives or participants' stories enable an exploration of how understandings of good practice are socially constructed in time and space through the narratives that nursery workers might tell. Stories are conceptualised as '*interactive engagements'* where people '*construct a sense of who they are'*, enabling a focus on how characters and the narrator are positioned and how the 'self' (or narrator) is positioned with regard to dominant discourses (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008: 385). In this sense, the 'self' can be analysed as the ways in which nursery workers' behaviour is controlled in order to manage their emotions and how they follow the government policies.

1.5 Rationale for the study

My interest in this topic began with my involvement in assessing and teaching on the Foundation Degree in Early Years and The Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) programmes, introduced by the Children Workforce Development Council (CWDC) in 2006 (CWDC, 2006). The programmes were introduced as a direct result of the government document on a Children's Workforce Strategy (Department for Education and Skills, 2005: 24-25) that stated:

> The early years workforce is critical to supporting of giving children the best start in life' … 'a better qualified workforce and with more workers trained to professional level is part of the Government's vision of childcare services in this country becoming among the best in the world… the workforce plays a crucial role in determining the quality of provision'.

At the time, both programmes I was involved with aimed to increase the skills and competence of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce, and to contribute to the recognition of their professional identity. Students were required to meet

a set of professional standards, and to provide evidence of their work-based learning and practice. Being an academic who came to the UK nearly three decades ago, and teaching mature students, the process of 'becoming a professional' intrigued me, especially with regard to the dichotomy between the students who were completing the programmes and the low qualification requirements needed for working in the nurseries. Since 2008, in Serbia, my home country, the minimum qualification required to become a nursery worker is a Batchelor Degree (Pálinkás, 1984), which is the same as in many other European countries (Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia as examples) (Korintus 2017). In the UK, however, to work with babies and young children, no higher qualification than a level 3 is required. Instead, nurseries need to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2014a) framework in which providers:

> '… *must make sure staff have the appropriate qualifications to count in the ratios, including the need to have at least one staff member trained in paediatric first aid*' (DfE, 2014a; 2017a:24).

This concern is discussed in later sections (see 2.2 and 2.2.1).

The majority of students on both programmes I was involved with were mature women who had returned to learning after a long break from formal education. (In the last decade I had only taught three male students on these programmes). Most of these women had extensive experience of working in a nursery, while some entered the ECEC field as a second career opportunity after giving birth. In my previous research on the reason mature students participate in higher education (Mikuska, 2014), I argued that learning has become transformative for mature students in respect of their performance in employment, their self-esteem, and their social functioning. I also found that their professional work was not highly valued, despite having completed various degree level programmes, which leads to a social injustice.

This aspect of ECEC has attracted much attention (Campbell-Barr, 2014; 2019) and is widely considered to be an important factor, shaping the ways in which the occupation of nursery workers is viewed (Urban, 2008; 2010), and the status which is attached to nursery work in terms of pedagogical approaches and staff structure (Bonetti, 2018; Moss, 2019). Therefore, the rationale for this study is in the political context in which nurseries continuously receive attention by the government in England. The uniqueness is in the paradox of professional work that nursery workers are required to do, yet for

unsustainable low pay and constant changes in quality requirements (Osgood, 2012; Moss, 2019).

Despite recognition of the key role of nursery workers in improving the quality of early years' provision, a large proportion of nursery workers are struggling financially. The Education Policy Institute's 2019 report *The Early Years Workforce in England* (Bonetti, 2019) sees a worrying trend that the ECEC workforce earned an average hourly pay of £8.20 in 2018 – around 40 per cent less than the average female worker in England. This leaves nursery workers in a position of considerable financial insecurity. A high proportion of nursery workers are claiming state benefits or tax credits (44.5 per cent). This also does nothing to dispel the culture, in some schools and colleges, that childcare should only be seen as a route for those with low prior-attainment (Hutchinson et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Hutchinson et al. (2019) suggested that childcare providers frequently report difficulties in hiring staff, particularly well qualified staff that have full and relevant level 3 qualifications. The ECEC workforce is also far less qualified than the teaching workforce and the general female working population. In 2018, 25.1 per cent of the childcare workers had completed a degree; by contrast, around 93 per cent of teachers have a degree or equivalent. Overall, qualification levels have marginally increased, but at a very slow pace in the last few years.

Supporting childcare workers to upskill and gain higher qualifications is critical to the quality of early years' education, yet many workers are not undertaking further training, in part due to fewer opportunities provided by employers. The reason could lay in a deeply rooted division between care and education that delays significant investment from the government in nurseries that offer places for children from birth to five years. This dichotomy persists due to the great imbalance in investment for nurseries, including the continuous weak position of nursery workers. For example, for those that do upskill, there is no guarantee of career progress. This trend is particularly worrying for nursery workers, given their relatively low level of education at the time they enter the profession and the importance of professional development to improve workforce quality. Therefore, addressing all these concerns is vital for their professional recognition.

1.6 Qualification requirements in England

Bonetti's (2018) quantitative study aimed to create a detailed picture of the ECEC demographics, pay and qualification level. Bonetti's study discovered a worrying trend in the decreasing levels of qualification within the early years' workforce. Most notable is the drop in numbers of level 3 qualified staff from 83% to 75% since 2015 (NDNA, 2016). It was further reported that overall staff turnover was higher than in previous years due to continuous low wages and lack of progression. NDNA (2016) also found that employers had reduced staff training budgets as a result of heavy financial burdens but at the same time needing to keep pace with the National Living Wage and pension costs. Qualification is a critical factor in securing good outcomes for children, as Melhuish and Gardiner's (2018) research findings showed. They stated that the more hours spent in formal and informal good quality settings between ages two and four, the greater the benefits for child cognitive and socio-emotional development. Good quality settings generally employ qualified nursery staff. Despite government attempts to improve training and qualifications for the ECEC workforce, at least a third of those working in the nursery were found to be only at Level 3 or below (Bonetti, 2018).

The level of qualification is also an important factor for employability. From 1st September 2014, all level 3 qualifications were required to meet the early years' educator criteria designed by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) (2013). This meant that all nursery staff who had registered for a qualification since 1st September 2014 could be counted in the EYFS staff: child ratios, if they held a level 3 early years educator qualification, and have suitable level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications. If a person holds a level 3 early years qualification but does not have suitable level 2 literacy and numeracy qualifications, they can only count as nursery staff at level 2 in the EYFS staff: child ratios. This has a major impact on the way in which nurseries operate as changes in the ratio could have a measurable effect on both staff and child behaviour (Bown, 2013). For example, a qualified staff member (at least a level 3 qualification) could be required to care for 13 children, while a non-qualified staff member (below level 3 qualification) can only care for eight children (see EYFS, DfE, 2014a:24).

Bonetti (2018) also reported that the age profile of nursery workers who are over 39 years is about 60 per cent. Similarly, Hutchinson et al.'s (2019) research showed that, in 2018, around 90,000 nursery workers were 55 years old or above. Bonetti's (2018) report

showed that more than half of highly qualified staff (level 6 and above) were aged over 40, with 21 per cent aged over 50. Both figures suggest that the ECEC field could soon be losing a substantial number of staff due to retirement (especially childminders), with insufficient younger groups entering the sector to keep up with additional demand for childcare.

1.7 Discourses of nursery workers

It is important to highlight the highly gendered composition of the workforce and how nursery workers have been positioned professionally with reference to policy discourses of the 'substitute mother', nursery workers as 'technicist' and nursery worker as 'change agent'. The argument is supported by the statistical trend in terms of women's employment and qualification of the ECEC workforce in England. These discourses largely draw on the work of Moss (2006; 2017), Osgood (2012) and Bonetti (2018) and examine how nursery workers have been positioned within a predominantly low status and gendered workforce.

1.7.1 Substitute mother

The quantitative study by Bonetti (2018) also focused on gender and revealed that childcare continues to be the most female dominated of all occupations in the UK, with 97 per cent of the workforce comprising women. In addition, despite the popular belief that Nordic countries have more gender equal societies, Bonetti reported that the percentages of men working in childcare in Nordic countries are similar to those in the UK - for example, three per cent in Sweden, four per cent in Finland, and five per cent in Denmark and Norway. The European Commission (2019) data also shows that just 1.8 per cent of nursery workers, and four per cent of childminders are male. Moss (2006; 2017) argued that a highly gendered ECEC workforce on low pay reflects a historic discourse of a 'substitute mother', where the only requirement to work with young children is that of having a 'maternal instinct'. For example, during and after World War 2, there has been a powerful maternal discourse about the role of mothers in caring and educating their infants (Burn and Pratt-Adams, 2015) which reconfirms the long standing assumptions that motherhood is a sufficient grounding for working with young children. This assumption was culturally perceived since, in the post 1945 UK welfare state, there was a clear gender differentiated model of family life, in which men were 'bread-winners' and women were

full-time carers, with women and children financially dependent upon men. Therefore, it is not surprising that motherhood and women's work in ECEC have long influenced early childhood policy and practice. Osgood (2012) further explained that the discourse is based on the evidence that the mother's natural instinct is to look after their children and therefore nursery work is seen as an extension of this role. This suggests that being a nursery worker is an unskilled job performed by women.

Since women's employment has seen an increase in the labour market, demand for childcare has significantly risen. The Institute for Fiscal Studies commissioned research in 2018 to investigate the rise of women's employment in the UK. Roantree and Vira (2018) reported that over the past 40 years, the UK has seen an almost continual rise in the proportion of women in employment. The employment rate among women of 'prime working age' (aged 25-54) has increased from 57% in 1975 to a record high of 78% in 2017. This predominantly reflects a rise in full-time employment, from 29% in 1985 (when data on hours of work began) to 44% in 2017. It is also because women are now much less likely to drop out of the labour market around the time they have their first child, and much more likely to stay in paid work in the years following. The rise has been particularly large among lone mothers and mothers of pre-school- and primary-school-age children. They also reported that increases in maternal employment have been largest among the partners of higher-earning men as well as among women with degrees. A contributing factor to the rise in employment is a shift in the working patterns of women across the life cycle such as working part-time or reduced hours. Chevalier and Viitanen (2010) highlighted the causality between female labour force participation and the availability of childcare. Blackburn (2004) reported that, in the period between 1990 and 2000, the UK day nursery market more than doubled, with day nurseries accounting for about 30% of registered child care places and, in 2003, they grew by 13%.

With the demand for childcare places, child care costs and the quality of childcare have become important factors for parents when choosing care for children. This has close connections with the discourse of 'substitute mother', qualification requirements for nursery staff as well as with the quality of services they provide.

1.7.2 Technical competences

Since the Childcare Act 2006, all early years providers in England have been required to register and be subjected to inspection by Ofsted. Vincent and Ball (2006), however,

stated that the private day nursery sector remains a competitive, but fragmented market. In England, the overwhelming majority (78%) of nurseries are private (profit-making), voluntary and independent (Robert-Holmes, 2012), for which there are no requirements to employ qualified staff (DfE, 2014a; 2017a). There has been much debate as to who can work with children, and what kind of skills and qualifications nursery workers need. These debates are based largely on the nature of ECEC policies that seek to '*improve the quality of early years training*' (DfE, 2017b:2) and which:

> '… *set the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe*' (DfE, 2014a:5).

In order to meet these requirements, Moss (2006: 36) described the nursery worker as a 'technician', who has:

> '… *varying levels of skill and qualification. But their role is to apply a defined set of technologies through regulated processes to produce pre-specified and measurable outcomes'.*

This type of work is in contrast to the discourse of the 'substitute mother' as previously explained. Moss's (2006) ideas of the 'technician' link closely to Osgood's (2005; 2010) analysis of developments in the early years workforce. Nursery workers have been subject to increased state regulation and accountability, resulting in an increased workload and emphasis on '*technical competence and performativity*' (Osgood, 2012: 146). Despite all these challenges for the nursery workers, there is opportunity for progress to be made in repositioning the ECEC workforce. It could be argued that nursery workers have the potential to be re-positioned as 'change agents' with the ability to contest the discourse of 'substitute mother' as well as the 'technicist' approach to professional recognition. Osgood (2012) proposed that nursery workers can transform the existing 'image' through professionalising the ECEC workforce which, firstly, embraces 'ethics of care', recognising the importance of supporting and protecting children and families and secondly, acknowledges the importance of critical reflection on how nursery workers have been positioned. Osgood (2012), however, highlighted that the way in which nursery workers have been micromanaged is largely invisible and difficult to challenge. Nursery workers can be seen as change agents in the way in which they interpret and transform policy which can make opportunities for new discourses to be created through the merging of existing discourses, such as the 'substitute mother' and 'technician'.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

Chapter One has provided a detailed explanation about the Early Childhood Education and Care in England and explained that there are strategies in place regarding how to support and guide the workforce. However, austerity policies and cuts to funding have impacted on both children's centres and nurseries, resulting in closures and amalgamations and challenges for nursery workers in terms of how to meet the demands for childcare places and how to maintain the quality of services they provide. A discourse of the 'substitute mother' reflects how, historically, the ECEC workforce has been made up, to a large extent, of low-paid female practitioners working in a low status sector, constrained under austerity policies. Despite workforce reforms, these issues remain largely unaddressed within discourses of the 'technician'. For example, the introduction of the Early Years Teacher Status has failed to address issues of equity with Qualified Teacher Status, showing the dichotomy between care and education. In addition, further tensions have emerged for nursery workers in terms of work-life balance, such as being a mother and a worker. Ethics of care are undervalued and nursery workers continue to leave the sector for better pay and progression opportunities.

Drawing upon literature that directly addresses nursery workers and the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) terrain, *Chapter Two* provides an explanation of which literature has been chosen for detailed critique and why. This chapter has four sections. The first part explains the policy implications and the importance of high-quality learning for young children and the professionalisation of the workforce, thus addressing the debate about qualification requirement for nursery workers. The second part addresses the importance of early attachments between parents and their children and its translation to the role of the nursery workers. Emotional wellbeing of children, and parental choices of childcare services are also discussed. The third part explores the literature that is strongly associated with gender, gendered work and women in general, followed by the importance of attention to emotions and emotional labour. The theoretical approach of the study, that is the adoption of a feminist framework, is explained in the fourth part of the chapter.

Chapter Three discusses the methodological approach and justifies the method deployed in the study. Three main aspects are emphasised in this chapter. First, the significance of adopting a narrative inquiry as a methodological approach; second, the ways in which qualitative data were collected and selected to inform this study and the ethical

dimensions; and third, the position of the researcher in the process of collecting, selecting and analysing data.

The narrative approach (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008), and application of feminist theory encountered during the research, is considered. The use of NVivo 11 as an analytical tool is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present and discuss the findings from the research. *Chapter Four* explores the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) statutory framework and the ways in which participants interpreted the policy. It highlights how they described the way in which the policy 'made' them act in certain ways in order to be 'good' at what they do. While most of the participants talked about the importance of the qualification as it has the attachment of professional recognition, there is in the data a sense of confusion about the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) framework, which in turn produced a tension in terms of the appreciation of the specialised ECEC knowledge. Whilst the framework was largely welcomed, the sentiments around the 'overdue' framework were mitigated by the belief of the participants that the reform has resulted in demands to alter their practice, sometimes in unreasonable ways.

There were different views about qualification requirements which showed different understandings of how participants' formation of 'good' is currently shaped. In many ways the application of top-down measures designed to enhance the quality of nursery provision was viewed as inherently benign and overwhelmingly positive. It is argued in the discussion of the findings that there has to be a place for complexity, values, flexibility, subjectivity, and multiple perspectives regarding what is considered as 'good' practice.

Chapter Five shows that there were inconsistencies in the findings in terms of the ways in which participants described their construction of the 'good' nursery worker. Some built on their own experiences, such as maternalism, that shaped their understanding and construction of the nursery work. The importance of attachment is discussed, whereby some of the participants made it clear that it was desirable for the child to be with their mother. This view confirms the culturally and historically embodied belief of attachment theory and maternalism (Ailwood, 2008) as well as the importance of the key working approach which supports the child's emotional well-being.

This chapter also discusses the views of those who felt strongly that the maternalistic approach devalues the ECEC workforce and their professional ability to make decisions on how to care for children in their nursery. Nursery managers formed a slightly different construction of 'good' nursery practice as their approach to maintain a financially healthy nursery was at the forefront.

Chapter Six discusses and evaluates emotional labour in nursery practice. All the participants in this study were asked to describe and explain who they would consider to be a 'good' nursery worker. Additionally, they were asked what they felt made them good at their work, and what skills they needed to work with children. The investment of the emotional human capital to produce high quality 'good' service was spoken of by all participants. In particular, the connection between different kinds of emotions and affections were highlighted, such as love, passion, and the 'right attitudes' as part of nursery workers' everyday practice. These emotions, including personal cost and benefits of emotional labour, are discussed in the first part of the chapter. The second part of the chapter debates the impact of motherhood on nursery work, while the third part focuses on how nursery workers have to deal with the parents' emotions when leaving their child in the nursery. Although all three themes were interwoven, there was a particular uniqueness to all strands.

Chapter Seven draws together the findings to discuss the implications for the future of nursery workers and for education and social policy with regard to how to raise the status and how to promote the issue of recognising the emotional aspect of the work. This final chapter concludes by summarising the findings in relation to the research questions and aims. It also considers the strengths and limitations of the study as well as the effect the process of the doctoral study has had on my professional practice. Recommendations are made about directions for further research in relation to what good nursery practices are, and how closely it is linked to professionalisation of the ECEC as a whole. The role of institutions of initial professional preparation has been explained.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the key literature and the theoretical approach that influenced this study. The aim of the review was to identify the main themes that explore the connection between the 'good' nursery work(er), and early childhood education and care (ECEC) practices in England. Particular focus was on policies imposed by the government, how these shape the practices in the nurseries, and on the process of professional recognition of the nursery workers. Two academic web search engines were employed, Google Scholar and Dawsonera, to search broad terms such as 'good nursery practice' and 'nursery work in England'. Google Scholar identified the academic literature surrounding nursery work, while Dawsonera, which is the University of Chichester's on-line source of resources, provided a more refined search with the most concentrated research hits.

The references in the identified literature were carefully considered in order to ensure that a thorough coverage of the pertinent literature was included. It was evident that the majority of the most relevant literature relating to nursery workers dated from 1999, which set one of the parameters for the literature review. Other parameters were topic and theory related as well as the context of the studies beyond England (UK and Australia, for example). The review revealed a large number of studies on nursery workers' professionalisation (e.g. Cameron, 2006; Osgood, 2006; 2010; 2012; Miller, 2008; Moss, 2008; 2017; Taggart, 2011) and on government policies relevant to nursery work (Cameron et al., 1999; Penn, 2000; Cameron et al., 2002; Moss, 2007; Urban, 2010). There were also several studies addressing emotions in nursery work (Colley, 2006; Elfer and Dearnley, 2007; Elfer, 2012; Osgood, 2012; Elfer et al., 2018) and males in the nurseries (Cameron et al., 1999; Cameron, 2006; Roberts-Holmes and Brownhill, 2011; Brody, 2014). Appendix 2 provides details of the search strategy and the number of items identified.

When searching the keyword 'ECEC policy in England' the table demonstrates that this created the highest number of hits across the search engines, which totalled in excess of 4 million. To narrow the search I combined the keywords, such as 'Early years + policy + England + EYFS.' This reduced the number of hits significantly, for example in Google the hits were 5180 while on Dawsonera the number of hits was 97. To further refine the

review, and to reduce the vast amount of hits, key authors in the field were checked (namely Verity Campbell-Barr, Peter Elfer, Linda Miller, Peter Moss, Jayne Osgood, Geoff Taggart and Mathias Urban) (See Appendix 1).

I combined the search by adding more specific words such as 'nursery work + gendered work' 'nursery work + emotional recognition + professional love' as well as the word 'feminism' as an indicator for the theoretical framework of this study. When these specific terms/words were used, the number of hits was significantly lower. This indicated the potential uniqueness of this study and that the emotional aspect of the nursery work is still under-researched.

It should be noted that the emotional aspects of the writings generally addressed children's emotional wellbeing and the importance of attachment rather than nursery workers' emotional involvement in caring work. It is also important to note that the majority of the literature was addressing nursing as a caring profession; nursery work was rarely mentioned as caring and as a professional occupation.

Four dominant themes emerged from the literature review related to 'good' nursery work as follows:

1) Policy implications, school readiness, and professionalisation of the ECEC workforce.
2) The implication for nurseries of an increased labour participation by working mothers.
3) Gendered work and women in general (nursery work as a female occupation, returning mothers to workforce, men in nurseries).
4) The importance of attention to emotions (mainly children) and emotional labour.

As the research progressed, further searches of the literature took place at regular intervals within the study in order to identify references that had become available during the research process. Sites such as Academia and ResearchGate were used.

These themes are now examined. In the first section (2.2), the theme of the professionalisation of the workforce and policy implication is addressed as well as qualification requirements for working with 0-5 years old children in England. Furthermore, a growing body of literature that relates to research undertaken with parents, mainly mothers, who use the childcare services is explained.

The second section (2.3) focuses upon the theme of the highly gendered composition of the workforce. This aspect of ECEC has attracted much attention as it is considered to shape how the job of nursery workers is viewed.

The third section (2.4) explores the literature related to the importance of attention to emotions and emotional labour as an aspect of nursery work within the context of how it influences the construction of 'good' nursery work. The final section (2.5) presents and explains the theoretical framework used to highlight how governmentality operates in the ECEC.

2.2 Policy implications, school readiness, professionalisation of the ECEC workforce

Investigating the concept of the 'good' nursery worker is connected with the development of relevant policies, with the notion of professionalism and with UK signing the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) in 1990 which came into effect in January 1992. The significance of signing the legally binding international agreement was that the statutory frameworks in early years are supported by these articles. For example, articles 1 to 42 are the main articles affecting the children in a nursery and they include non-discrimination, respect for the views of the child, and protection from violence, abuse and neglect. Articles 43 to 54 are about how adults and governments must work together to make sure all children can enjoy all their rights. The impact of the variety of articles of the UNCRC is evident in the EYFS (DfE, 2014) such as actively promoting equality and diversity, narrowing any gaps in outcomes between different groups of children, safeguarding children and tackling bullying and discrimination.

ECEC in England lacked any form of national financial support or policy direction until 1966 when the Conservative Government introduced a voucher scheme for working parents to pay for part-time nursery places for four-year old children (Miller and Cable 2008). This financial support for parents was welcomed; however this still led the sector to be dependent on the ability for parents to pay for their services. In 1997 the National Childcare Strategy was introduced where the early years services became part of the government Department for Education which was welcomed by the national ECEC organisations. It was hoped that the first step was made to integrate the ECEC services with other education organisations. The widespread adaptation of the generic term 'early years services' replaced the historic 'childcare' term. The 'Ten Year Childcare Strategy' (HM Treasury et al., 2004) outlined the strategy to improve the skills of the ECEC

workforce. At the same time the Children's Workforce Development Council was set up to drive the reform and, in 2006, the government published the Children's Workforce Strategy (DfES, 2006). The goal was to have an 'integrated qualification framework' which would 'help with recruitment, retention, and remodelling the more professional workforce' (DfES, 2006: 22). This is when the professionalisation agenda began with the aim to raise the status of the ECEC workforce. The new Early Years Professional Status was introduced by the CWDC in 2006.

At the same time, The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was established under the Childcare Act 2006 and is a framework for learning, development and care for children from birth to five. The EYFS framework became statutory in 2008, and was introduced as part of the British National Curriculum, which all Ofsted registered early years settings must follow (DCSF, 2008). This high profile policy attention was not only to address the ECEC workforce, but also to serve particular political agendas, such as to improve the employability of parents by providing childcare support to assist them to work, and enable better outcomes for children to tackle disadvantage (HM Treasury et al., 2004). The ECEC workforce was, therefore, constructed as the means by which the Government could achieve its vision. Nursery workers have been given a central role to secure for children the '*best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential'* (DfE, 2014a: 5), and to educate them in an 'appropriate' way:

> '*Children are the citizens, workers, parents and leaders of the future. It is in everyone's interest in investing in children to ensure that they have opportunities and capabilities to contribute positive ways throughout their lives'*. (HM Treasury et al., 2004, section 2: 7)

With this vision, the government began to micromanage the ECEC workforce, and the settings within which they are working. The regulation by inspection under Ofsted (Miller and Hevey, 2012) proved that the early years provision was centralised, leaving little space for the nursery workers to exercise creativity as well as facing the danger of a reduction in professional autonomy. The concept of 'good' became limited to the government vision. In such a policy context there is another danger, that both nursery workers' good practice and children's development and emotional well-being are measured as 'outcomes' against externally prescribed standards and benchmarks, to ensure that services are worth investing in.

When, in 2010, the coalition government gained power, in their first year in office they commissioned a review of the EYFS (Tickell, 2011). As a result, in 2012, a revised, slimmer version of the framework was introduced (DfE, 2012). This simplified version was largely welcomed across the early years sector (Pugh and Duffy, 2014). However, the 'reproduction' of the EYFS framework proved that the early years sector was under scrutiny once again. Despite the 'unified' EYFS framework, the government's focus on 'school readiness' was evident. The 'school readiness' was a key priority for Ofsted, as stressed in a report published in 2015 (Ofsted, 2015). Ofsted's conceptualisation of 'school readiness' was framed by ideas that young children must be ready to conform to the specific demands of a defined school routine and curriculum, rather than as a process of co-creating learning spaces and activities, and building relationships. The early years workforce was judged against government defined measures of 'quality', which in turn are determined by a narrow definition of 'school readiness' and specific measures of child outcomes at developmental stages. For these reasons, the continuity of the conceptual division between 'education' and 'care' (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Moss, 2006; 2016; 2019) between 0-3 and 3-5 years old children, as well as debates about 'quality' in early childhood, remained high on the policy agenda (Cannella et al., 2016).

Whilst the 'school readiness' agenda captured in policy discourse stresses the need to prepare young children for primary school, there are numerous counter positions, many underpinned by pilosophical conceptualisations of the child that view childhood as more than simply the preparation for adulthood. These counter arguments emphasise the distinction between early childhood education and care. For example, Trevarthan (2011: 175) argued that early years institutions should encourage learning, but clearly differentiated this from 'schooling':

> '*Preschool nurseries should encourage children to learn from adventurous play in a rich environment … children too young to benefit from classroom schooling are eager participants in peer communities with their own meanings, arts and techniques'.*

This approach was stipulated by Michael Gove since, during his term as an Education Secretary, he gave a speech in which he highlighted the direction of the ECEC stating:

> '*We've introduced screening checks at the age of 6 to make sure children are recognizing and blending letters to read words fluently. We are introducing a basic test for competence, spelling, punctuation and grammar …*' (Gove, 2013).

As Gove stated, the government's emphasis, through the national strategy, was on literacy and numeracy. The workforce was seen as an important part of the process that connects policy intentions to practice interventions. This trend was evident within the updated (third) version of the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) which was implemented in September 2014, following the government's response to the consultation on 'The Regulation of Childcare' (DfE, 2014b). 'Childcare' was the new phrase used which potentially marginalises Early Childhood Education and Care, leading to the de-professionalisation of the workforce. However, this is nuanced with the 'school readiness' debate. Although the new version of the EYFS mainly saw changes in the Safeguarding and Welfare section, the formal approach to schooling and 'meeting the needs' of the child within the EYFS remained at the fore. This approach can be traced to the seven areas of learning and development (see EYFS, page 7) as these areas were used as 'tools for assessment' and 'data collection', which in turn are used to measure children's readiness, rather than as a guide to nursery workers on how best to work with children.

Nursery workers' well-being and their emotional investment in their professional job, that is the emotional labour, was disregarded. The conceptual division, therefore, between 'education' and 'care' remained a concern as it drives the nursery worker in a particular direction. This is one that needs to ensure that '*no aspect of the child must be left uneducated; education touches spirit, soul, motivation, wishes, desires, dispositions and attitudes*' (Fendler, 2001: 121). What is key for future society is, however, the creation of a child as a self-governing subject; therefore it should be fundamental that the EYFS endorses this notion rather than one whereby '*sufficient time each day [is devoted] to the direct teaching of reading, writing and mathematics'* (DfE, 2017: 6). This suggests that the government's aim has not changed since 1997 when the New Labour's first education White Paper was published stating that:

> *'Our aim is that all children should begin school with a head start in literacy, numeracy and behaviour, ready to learn and make the most of primary education'.* (Former Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, 1997: 14)

Similar comment was made by Gove in 2013 in his speech, when he said:

> *'We need to make sure that children arrive in school ready to learn'* (Former English Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, 2013)

This quote clearly identifies the way in which the government continues to see the future of the ECEC sector. Since 2011, the government has brought out a set of documents

prescribing a curriculum-centred approach for the Foundation Stage, and has considered assessment testing of 'school readiness' in children; this generated heated debates among academics and researchers. One of the reasons behind the arguments (Bingham and Whitebread, 2012; Moss, 2012; 2019) was that the government used the term 'school readiness' as a finite construct, neglecting the play element in children's learning, and implying there should be a fixed standard for assessing children's development that mainly focuses on cognitive and linguistic skills.

The government claimed that children were not ready for school by aged five, with delayed speech and poor social skills as the most commonly cited issues. The government's vision was to regulate why and by when children should be 'ready for school', so the revised statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2014a: 2) encompassed official standards for learning, development, and care for babies and young children that must be met by stating:

> '*The EYFS promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life'.*

While the original idea of the implementation of the EYFS was to support the nursery workers' good work, there was very limited guidance as to how to do this and the skills that were required to support a seemingly 'needy' child. Policies that measure outcomes devalue '*the labour of love, care, and solidarity*' (Apple, 2013:16) that underpins the nursery worker role.

Academics such as Dalli and Urban (2010) and Urban (2010), who have researched the professionalisation of the ECEC, have suggested that the notion of professionalism is linked to professional and practical knowledge where:

> '*… ambitious policy goals… can only be achieved by a skilled and qualified workforce whose practice is guided by a professional body of knowledge*' (Urban, 2008: 135).

Osgood (2012) argued that due to the lack of professional skills, the nursery workers' role has been considered as low skilled and undervalued. As a result, Moss (2010; 2019) further argued, that nursery workers in England have been constructed as a group of people who are 'lacking' professional skills and knowledge which has a detrimental effect on the way in which nursery workers are constructed.

Osgood (2010, 2012), Urban (2010), Chalke (2013) and Campbell-Barr (2014) have all indicated that the debate about the professionalisation of the workforce became one of the most discussed discourses in ECEC. Oberhuemer (2005) stated that there are many interpretations of 'professional' or 'professionalism' as they are not universally understood. This concept makes space for the possibility of a new form of professional identity to emerge. Osgood (2012: 120) defined professionalism as an *'apolitical construct broadly defined by the acquisition of specific knowledge and qualifications'*. Urban et al. (2012) claimed that the close connection between the quality of provision for young children and professionalisation are two inseparable aspects of the ECEC practices. Urban et al. (2012) also noted that to distinguish the workforce knowledge from parental knowledge, traditional recognition is needed through relevant qualification. Urban et al. (2012: 515) further stated that '*the quality of ECEC depends on the competence of people working with children, families and communities'* where they defined competence '*with the holistic understanding of the ECEC'* rather than seeing competence as a particular set of skills or particular knowledge. Therefore, the concept of nursery work as a profession is complex, as it struggles to gain cultural recognition in society.

Osgood (2010) also argued that one of the main discussions around nursery workers as professionals is how they have been constructed in policy documents. ECEC policies have created a conception that there is a '*crisis in childcare'* (Osgood, 2010: 1) as policies seek to '*improve the quality of early years training*' (DfE, 2017b: 2) and:

> '*… set the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe*' (DfE, 2014a: 5).

Miller and Hevey (2012) contended that the regulation and inspection of the nurseries under Ofsted highlighted that the ECEC provision was centralised, leaving little space for nursery workers to be creative. This can have a negative effect on the workers' creative skill and professional autonomy as the concept of 'good' nursery work can became limited to the government vision. In such a policy context there is a risk of seeing nursery workers' good practice through measured outcomes. Osgood (2010: 124) stipulated that the evidence based nursery work feeds the government agenda of justifying that early years services are worth the investment. 'Measuring' such outcomes disregards not only the uniqueness of the individual child, which may neglect the cultural, language and other heritage valued by their parents, but also the nursery worker's creative skill.

The policy implication, consequently, has seen the introduction and requirement for nursery workers to have increased levels of regulation, accountability, and professional qualifications. As a result, over the past two decades, nursery workers have become a central focus for the government in terms of revisiting and implementing new ECEC policy and guidance in England.

2.2.1 Qualification as an increased sense of professionalism

The wider assumption is that relevant higher education qualifications produce a professional nursery worker (Miller, 2008; Urban et al., 2012). It is widely accepted that specific knowledge leads to the definition of the 'professional'. For example, Tan (2014) argued that education (and qualification) increases human capital through knowledge and skills and with it professional recognition. Lloyd and Hallet (2010: 76) also argued that there was a more traditionally accepted framework of a professional including:

> '*… the monopolisation of specific and exclusive skills and knowledge, group member solidarity and restricted access to learning opportunities requiring accreditation to practice'*.

The suggestion here links the ideas of competence to ECEC practice with accreditation and qualification. Since the ECEC workforce currently does not match the above requirements, nursery workers are required to develop skills, knowledge, how to provide professional practice, and understanding for working with children while engaging in practice. Osgood (2010, 2012) and Dalli and Urban (2010) stipulated that there are challenges for the ECEC workforce of fitting some of these practices into any existing construction of professionalism, suggesting that professionalism in ECEC needs reframing. Furthermore, professionalisation revolves around questions about the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 1988); that is, how nursery workers manage themselves, how nursery workers manage others and how others manage the nursery workers. Such a perspective begins from an understanding of 'the non-necessity of what passes for necessity in our present' (Burchell et al., 1991: 279). For example, having an adequate qualification can act as a 'non-necessity'. This does not mean that qualifications should not be gained; rather, it questions ideas about qualifications in ways that potentially create space for rethinking the role of ECEC, where nursery workers consider how to resist government rules. Rose (1999: 52) suggested that technologies of governmentality are those tactics, strategies, ideas and knowledge that delimit and shape 'conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired events'. In these terms,

the construction of what constitutes 'good' nursery work means that qualification can be considered as technologies of governmentality that shape the conduct of both adults and children in nurseries.

Since the ECEC work has been perceived as low-skilled work, the development of a professionalisation agenda has helped to design 'graduate qualification' (Miller, 2008), with the aspiration of having a positive impact on the delivery of 'good' and 'quality' nursery services, and on the professional identity formation for nursery workers. Aukrust and Rydland (2009) and Peeters and Vanderboeck (2011) built on this concept, and pointed out that 'competences' of the nursery workers are vital to ensure 'quality', while Aukrust and Rydland (2009) further stated that competence is influenced by staff qualifications through which other aspects of being a 'good' nursery worker materialise.

The introduction of the Early Years Professional Status (a graduate level status) was a result of the government's reform agenda in which the lack of professionalism among the ECEC workforce was acknowledged. It unveiled plans for the promotion of early years' workforce training, qualifications, skills and competence (HM Treasury et al., 2004). The Children Development Workforce Council (CWDC, 2008: 8) reported that:

> *'The move to a graduate led profession represents a transformation of the early years workforce. To drive this transformation the Government made it clear that their aim is to have an Early Years Professional (EYP) in every full day care setting by 2015 and one in every children's centre by 2010'.*

In the independent review of early education and childcare qualifications that was carried out for the Department for Education in 2012 by Nutbrown (2012: 4); the following was stated:

> '*Alongside these positive attitudes and the very many examples of good practice I have seen during the course of my Review, I have found some things that have caused me concern. Our present qualifications' system does not always equip practitioners with the knowledge and experience necessary for them to offer children high quality care and education, and to support professional development throughout their careers. Changes are needed, and I have made recommendations for how I believe this should be done – some for Government to consider, and others I hope the sector will take forward'.*

Similarly to Miller (2008), Nutbrown (2012: 2) also stated, that '*qualification is the foundation for quality*' while Urban et al. (2012: 523) reported that research has shown that while formal level of qualification of staff is an important factor for quality ECEC practices, it also informs the level of professionalism and competence where '*competence*

is more the sum of the individual practitioner's knowledge, skills and attitude'.
Furthermore, Nutbrown called for new qualification routes to be introduced for the ECEC workforce, and recommended that all nursery workers should have achieved a level 3 qualification by 2022. It was suggested that:

> '*People with 'full and relevant' qualifications and the introduction of the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) have led to a welcome and increased sense of professionalism in some parts of the sector … that ensured that early years qualifications are effective in developing the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to work with babies and young children'* (Nutbrown, 2012: 17).

It can be argued that by 'knowing' and by having relevant early childhood qualifications, high quality childhood services can be provided. Dean (2010) added that language and knowledge are essential to the production of a professional workforce. The establishment of a language and the spread of particular knowledge makes available frameworks within which subjects, nursery work for example, can come to be thought about. In producing such frameworks of 'knowability', particular strategies become established and can be 'normalised'. To begin asking the question of *how* knowledge has been produced requires a brief historical overview of nursery workers, their role and responsibilities and the ways in which they have been portrayed in society (as explained earlier). Dean's (2010) study is particularly helpful in unpicking the construction of the 'good' nursery worker in term of 'self' and 'conduct of conduct' in the EYFS (DfE, 2014a). It clearly shows the relationship between the policy, knowledge and 'self'.

Moss (2019) argued that, since children cannot think and act for themselves, government, and through policies the nursery worker, and parents must do this for them to ensure subsequent economic awards. Young children in this scenario are viewed as potential for economic growth through:

> *'The application of correct technical practice or 'human technologies' at a young age….[in which] the concept of human 'technologies' are processes and methods of working by people to people with the aim of better controlling or governing them'* (Moss, 2019: 12).

By adopting this approach, it is possible to consider alternative understandings of how the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) governs and guides the nursery worker. It becomes apparent how this particular policy seeks to invite the nursery worker to perform particular forms of self-work in order to achieve specific and desirable ways of being. Dean (2010: 24) suggested that this kind of response, such as the way in which a nursery worker may think, reason,

and respond to the problem, '*might draw upon formal bodies of knowledge or expertise*' which is a drive towards the professionalism agenda. In this context, the nursery worker is governing self, as part of the nature of the nursery practice in which they are engaged, in order to provide 'good' care for children.

Rose (1999: 52) further argued that through policy the '*government's aim is to achieve certain forms of outcome on the part of the governed'*. In ECEC practices it refers to certain knowledge held by both nursery workers and children; it includes knowing the stages of child development or approaches to professional practices, which measures the performance of children (and nursery workers) against the demands of the educational curriculum. For example, in the EYFS (DfE, 2014a: 11), children need to '*use phonic knowledge to decode regular words and read them aloud accurately*'. Unless nursery workers are equipped with skills of how to teach children to read, children will not learn how to decode regular words. So, in this sense, the 'good' nursery worker 'knows' what to teach and how to approach to teach children to read.

The standardised training, and target driven government policy was to fund those nursery workers who provided care in private nurseries; therefore, the creation of the Early Years Professional Status was explicitly aimed at professionalising the early years' sector. During 2011, however, the paradox between public sector spending cuts and the increased calls for the early years services to do better in addressing the '*needs of children and their families'* (Readon et al. 2018: 4) became a reality. The government announced their intention to continue to fund those working in the ECEC sector, due to research evidence, such as that in the Dame Clare Tickell Review (2011) of the EYFS, the Evaluation of the Graduate Leader Fund (Mathers et al., 2011) and the Nutbrown Review (2012). However, many of the recommendations have been rejected by the former Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2013, including the establishment of a clear and effective system of qualifications. Consequent reform was introduced through More Great Childcare (DfE, 2013) which set out the English government's vision about the ways in which quality can be raised. For example the EYFS (2014a: 10) stated that:

> '*A quality learning experience for children requires a quality workforce. A well-qualified, skilled staff strongly increases the potential of any individual setting to deliver the best possible outcomes for children'.*

However, the 'well qualified, skilled staff' is problematic here. The EYFS clearly defined which kind of qualification nursery managers need; however, nursery staff were addressed

as '*people looking after children'* (DfE, 2014a: 24). In the EYFS, under section 3, the qualification requirement for 'people looking after children' is part of the providers' role. It was stated that:

> '*Providers must ensure that people looking after children are suitable to fulfil the requirements of their roles. Providers must have effective systems in place to ensure that practitioners, and any other person who is likely to have regular contact with children, are suitable'* (DfE, 2014a: 18).

This requirement has not changed in the current EYFS (2017a). Therefore the construction of the nursery worker in policy discourse implies that, on the one hand, they should be 'well qualified' and, on the other hand, the setting has to have an 'effective system in place' to ensure high quality delivery. Government guidance for a 'well qualified' staff states that '*the manager … must hold at least a full and relevant level 3 qualification and at least half of all other staff must hold at least a full and relevant level 2 qualification*' (DfE, 2014a: 23). Miller and Hevey (2012) argued that unless there are good graduates to deliver (such as EYPs), the education system will not be successful. This example shows that policymaking and research findings are in contradiction with each other.

Furthermore, it has been proved that sustaining the EYP as a new government initiated status for the graduate nursery worker was unmanageable during the funding cuts. As a result, in 2013, EYP was replaced by the Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT). The revisited qualification under the Coalition Government (2010-2015) marked the start of the standardisation of the ECEC. The aim was to streamline the teaching qualification; therefore, Early Years Teachers in England must meet the same entry requirements as trainee primary school teachers to be awarded the Early Years Teacher (EYT) status (NCTL, 2017). It was of great concern that many of those who were awarded the EYT by meeting the requirements of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) Teachers Standards, have not been awarded the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). This was a clear example where government policies have positioned the nursery worker in a more disadvantaged way than teachers. English government policy has done little to overcome the deficit discourse of nursery workers in terms of the pay and professional recognition when compared with teaching professionals (Miller and Hevey, 2012). By doing so, the continuity of the split between the workforces (nursery worker v teacher) has been perpetuated.

2.2.2 Common sense or professional qualification?

Weedon (1997) argued that the social institutions in which individuals enter (nursery, school, family) 'guides' them how to act and behave. Children learn how boys and girls should behave, and what women and men should be. These subject positions, the ways in which the individual exists, and the values inherent in them may not all be compatible. What was offered for women is being a wife and mother where the focus is on raising a child as it is 'natural' for them. According to Weedon (1997), the appeal to 'natural' is the most powerful aspect of common sense thinking. It is the way of understanding social relations which denies history and the possibility to change the future. The nature of the 'care' work is therefore inherent in the contemporary sexual division of labour, the structure of family and their experience in the labour market. By gaining professional qualification the role of the 'care' (nursery) worker should be lifted from this perception.

Qualifications represent status (Oberhuemer, 2005), but it appears that there is a complex relationship between common sense and qualification. The question is often raised as to whether professionals are needed to work with babies and young children, since the societal understanding is that the role of the nursery worker is similar to the role of the 'babysitter'. It is clear that the ECEC workforce is required to move towards a greater sense of professional roles and identities to '*ensure that early years staff have clear and intelligible roles'* Nutbrown (2012: 17).

Bonetti (2018) argued that the ECEC workforce is fragmented and the workforce has hardly changed in terms of qualification level in the last two decades. However, it is not clear in Bonetti's report how that can be changed. This debate leads to the discussion of which kind of knowledge is really required to work with children. Steinnes (2014) compared 'common sense' with professional qualification when working with children and argued that obtaining qualifications helps to be 'good', but this is not the only factor which contributes to 'good' nursery work. Steinnes claimed that other factors such as knowing the cultural background of the child and experiences of working with children are equally important. Nevertheless, the idea of the nursery work as a professional occupation is undercut by the culturally and historically evolved common belief that work with young children is largely a matter of 'common sense'. Vincent and Braun's (2011) small scale research also found that for students studying childhood, the emphasis was on work with young children being largely a matter of 'common sense' rather than a repository of a particular knowledge and skills set.

Brebner et al. (2015) argued that young children need rich learning experiences to maximize their potential; therefore nursery workers should have specialised professional knowledge of individual children as well as skills that afford opportunities to provide language-rich environments for learning. The 'common sense' approach in this respect is not sufficient for forming the meaningful strong relationships between nursery, children and their families. However, the danger of having a streamlined qualification may create a system that implies there is only one right way of working with children. Moss (2010: 12) suggested that the discourses of 'quality', 'best practice' and 'evidence based practice', can produce the nursery worker who has been interpreted as a 'technician'.

2.3 The implication for nurseries of an increased labour participation by working mothers

The second emerging theme in the literature review was around increased labour participation of working mothers and early attachment between parents and their children. The Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017b) promoted the notion that mothers need to return to work after giving birth. The provision of childcare is seen as having the potential to bring women back into the workforce, thereby increasing productivity as well as lifting families out of poverty. As a result, the rising number of mothers with small children who were returning to the labour market was a phenomenon in England that demanded a response from the ECEC services as well as from the government.

Plowden (1967), however, argued that the increased labour participation of mothers has had an impact on children's development. In 1967, Plowden surveyed 3,000 children in primary schools and concluded that the lack of parental interest was the main reason that some children did not achieve their full potential. The result was used as a strategy for tackling educational disadvantage (Bastiani, 1989), and marked the official start of parental involvement in the English education agenda. The strategy emphasised home-school communication, regular meetings, open days and parent/teacher associations, but equally proposed limiting full-time nursery places based on the assumption that young children should spend part of the day with their mothers.

Rumbold (1990) also recognised the importance of the teacher and child forming positive relationships and stressed the need for a key person approach to foster attachment. Following Plowden's (1967) and Rumbolt's (1990) publications, significant changes have been made to ensure the development of progressive educational ideas. One of the major changes for nurseries has been the implementation of the key person system (DfE, 2014a).

This example illustrates that policymaking is subject to trends and the influence of the dominant viewpoint that serves the government's agenda.

2.3.1 Key person approach in early years

The increased participation of mothers in the labour market has resulted in an increase in the demand for nursery places. In order to meet this demand, the government rhetoric has shifted about their policies by making nurseries more attractive for working parents (mainly mothers). Firstly, they stipulated the importance of the attachment between the nursery worker and the child to demonstrate to parents that their children will be provided with 'good' care and, secondly, they introduced free entitlement for childcare.

It is widely accepted that there is a strong connection between motherhood and care which formed an important part in the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988). The theory supports mothers to be the 'natural' primary carers of children, stipulating the natural relations between mother and child. Leach (2009: 193) found that one of the most important contributing factors to the '*good and high quality nursery'* is the '*relationship'* between children and nursery workers which should be one of '*sensitivity, empathy, and attunement*'. Similarly Lynch et al. (2009: 420) argued that care work is emotionally engaged work and called it 'love labour'. They describe love labouring that is:

> '*.. undertaken through affection, commitment, attentiveness and the material investment of time, energy and resources'.*

Ailwood (2008: 159) identified the influence of maternalistic discourses in Froebel's theory for the training of teachers that sought to make conscious their natural motherhood skills. This debate remains a contemporary concern that continues to influence practices and perceptions of ECEC in the UK (Cannella 1997; Mikuska and Fairchild, 2020).

Although the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2014a) does not explicitly underline the need for motherhood skills or experience, the statutory requirements state that the key person approach needs to be in place in the nurseries which indicates that the nursery worker needs to build a special relationship and bond with the child. The EYFS (DfE, 2014a: 21) stated that:

> '*Each child much must be assigned a key person. Their role is to help ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs, to help a child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with the parents'.*

In this quote, there are two positions taken. First, there is the deficit model of the child who is in need and requires help. Second, the assumption has been made that nurturance and care, which draw on motherhood skills and experience, are considered vital attributes of the key person. However, by not recognising that many nursery workers are themselves working mothers, Osgood (2012: 25) argued that nursery workers become 'other mothers'. Osgood argued that the discourses around the balance of work and private life have produced a dichotomy whereby the parents in need of childcare are typically middle-class professional working mothers while nursery workers are stereotypically working class mothers.

Similarly, the Teacher's Standards (Early Years) (NCTL, 2013:2) guidance stipulates this view, stating that the Early Years Teacher should:

> *'... demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the attachment theories, their significance and how effectively to promote secure attachment'.*

The Teacher's Standard guidance, although similar to the EYFS (2014), is more focused on teaching and education of children than on attachment, which leads to the school readiness agenda. Not surprisingly, Moss (2012; 2019) identified the country of England as an active example of this dominant 'readiness' discourse and cautions that the status of this dominant discourse is problematic, being underpinned by conservative views of the child, education, learning, and knowledge.

2.3.2 Free entitlement to childcare

To make nurseries more attractive, in The Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017b: 6) the message was:

> *'This government is committed to supporting parents to access good quality early year' provision. We also want to support early years providers to deliver free entitlement places, including delivering the manifesto commitment to provide 30 hours of childcare for eligible working parents from September 2017'.*

The government's intention of raising the free entitlement to childcare from 15 to 30 hours a week for working parents (mothers) was to reduce the cost of childcare for working families and break down the barriers to work, so that parents who want to return to work or who want to work more hours can do so. The statement is clear evidence of the government endorsing women's participation in the workforce. Additionally, by recommending that children best develop from the provisions of the EYFS (DfE, 2014a),

the government has continued with their strategy of promoting the early years provisions to fulfil their agenda of implementing policies.

While the promotion of free childcare places makes the nursery relatively attractive, according to a survey about childcare choices conducted by Hutchinson et al. (2019), 53% of non-working mothers agreed they would return to work only if they could arrange good quality childcare. What is emerging from Hutchinson et al's (2019) report is that mothers would return to work if the nursery was good. Therefore the question needs to be asked as to what constitutes 'good' quality childcare for parents. When researching the literature, there are two main bodies of research that address this question, with both streams being closely linked to the concept of 'good mothers'.

2.3.3 'Good' mother versus 'good' nursery worker

One stream of the literature investigates the social location of mothers, and a second explores the ways in which good mother(hood) discourses shape the activities of mothering, constructing and defining what mothers do.

By making an attempt to define who good mothers are, class, race, sexuality and economic status of the ideal 'type' of mother have been drawn out, as good mothers are constructed differently in different social contexts. Arendell (2000: 1194) claimed that the good mother, against whom all others are measured, has certain characteristics. These are that they are heterosexual, married, monogamous, White and native born. Economically they are dependent on the earnings of their husband (unless she is independently rich and, in that case, allows her husband to handle the finances). Krane and Davies (2007: 56) further argued that good mother discourses position women as intuitive nurturers who are '*naturally equipped and always readily available to care for their children, no matter what the circumstances',* thus coining the term 'intensive mothering'. As Hays (1996: 47) explained, through discourses of intensive mothering '*a good mother would never simply put her child aside for her own convenience'*.

Additionally, good mother discourses are shown to shape the identities of mothers and the meaning of being a mother for some individual women, constructing and defining how mothers feel. Inevitably, the central focus of the good mother is how they care for their children and how they would like their children to be cared for. Winnicott (1988) also argued that the mother herself is the specialist in her own baby, and that professionals must not take away the mother's confidence in her instincts and natural knowledge.

Winnicott's most permanent term was of the 'good-enough mother', a phrase intended to release parents from the aspirational perfection.

From a parental perspective, good quality childcare, in which the nursery worker becomes the main actor, has to have the same or at least similar characteristics to a good mother. The role of good mother is transmitted to the nursery worker (Krane and Davis, 2007). Johnston and Swanson (2003:23) argued that '*a good mother is a happy mother; an unhappy mother is a failed mother'*. If the statement of Johnston and Swanson (2003) is correct, then the nursery worker who works for working mothers needs to be happy all the time in order to be thought of as 'good'.

Miller (2005: 86) stipulated that a good mother is required to '*act responsibly'* and to present themselves in '*culturally recognizable and acceptable ways'*. In Miller's view, a good mother is concerned with what is regarded as culturally desirable and socially acceptable for mothers, and that is to gain a fine balance between their child rearing and professional duties.

2.3.4 Connection between mother's employment, 'good mother', and professional love

The second stream of literature also explored some of the implications and connections between mother's employment and the notion of 'good mother'. This is exemplified by Ruddick's (1980) and Raddon's (2002) research which explored the notion of the 'mother as academic' and the 'good mother' connection, arguing that academics with children often need to disengage from their mothering role and duties while at work, making them feel 'guilty'. The feeling of 'guilt' also surfaced in Page's (2011a) research. Page studied mothers' views on choices for childcare, and found that some mothers feel 'guilt' when trying to balance family life with employment, especially when attempting to find care for their children with which they feel comfortable. She concluded that what mothers considered to be good quality childcare is a strong focus on 'love' as a desired trait of a carer who looks after their children. However, mothers are not always comfortable with the term 'love', despite seeking childcare providers to 'love' their children. This is in contrast with some European countries such as Hungary, for example, where to love the child is required, as 'child-loving-adults' is part of the quality nursery work (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015). In an attempt to capture the discourses of 'love', Page (2011a; 2011b) introduced the term 'professional love'. In doing so, she distinguished mother-love from love provided in a care situation and argued for the term 'love' to be used in ECEC as an

integral part of the practice (Page, 2018). Despite this effort, love and touch are much-debated aspects of caring for and nurturing young children in out-of-home care settings in England (Elfer and Page, 2015). As explained earlier, when looking for childcare places, mothers are looking for places where they feel their children will be loved. Love, however, is a contested concept as most of the ECEC workers, including students studying towards their qualification to work in the nursery, felt the need to constrain their emotions when working with children (Campbell-Barr et al. 2015).

Furthermore, Elfer and Dearnley (2007) and Elfer and Page (2015) investigated the close relationship between the nursery worker and children in their care. They reported that nursery workers show concerns about forming close bonds with the children, questioning what the correct degree of professional distance is. Nursery workers also talked about the possible impact this relationship could have on parents as they may become resentful. Nevertheless, Page's (2011a) qualitative study showed that parents who she had interviewed wanted the nursery worker to love their children (see 2.5 for more details).

2.4 The gendered composition of the nursery workers

This third theme considers the highly gendered composition of the workforce which has attracted much attention, as this aspect is widely considered to be a significant factor in shaping the ways in which the role, and 'good' nursery work(ers) are viewed. Cameron et al. (1999) argued that the meaning of 'gendered' operates at two levels, one which is individualised and one that is institutional. The individualised level is about what nursery workers bring to the nursery through their gender identity, their roles and the ways of being man or woman. At institutional level, the gendered understanding is embedded within historical and pedagogical understandings of why childcare exists. Therefore 'gendered' refers to the gender element of the nursery work which is often invisible.

2.4.1 'Feminised' and gendered nature of nursery work

The 'feminised' nature of ECEC has been the focus of much research, both nationally and internationally. The literature reviewed in this chapter indicates that childcare is an explicitly female profession in all countries (Peeters and Vandenbroeck, 2011). In all the professions which deal with children, women are in the majority and the degree of gender segregation is in direct relation to the age of the children in that the younger the children, the higher the percentage of women employed (Moss, 2006). Ailwood (2008), for example, analysed early childhood education and care policies in an Australian context,

highlighting the strong links between motherhood, women's place in the paid labour market and childcare. Her study emphasised the serious difficulties faced by the women who work in the nursery, work that is undervalued and underpaid, but at the same time they identify themselves as undertaking a 'mothering role'. The reason behind this positioning, Ailwood (2008) argued, is the strong culturally embedded view of mothers being less worthy if they choose institutional care for their children, indicating the pivotal role of mothers in the family. Wong (2007) also stated that, in an historical analysis of public, professional and government texts related to ECEC, nursery work has long been constructed as 'women's work', which is provided by women for women who are predominantly working mothers.

In most of the research that addresses the gendered nature of ECEC, the term 'feminised' is taken to have a dual meaning; firstly, it refers to the numerical predominance of women and secondly, it considers that the nature of the work is founded upon an understanding of 'feminine' characteristics such as nurturance, care and emotion. Whilst numerical dominance of women in the workforce does not necessarily mean that the work undertaken will be 'feminine', those researching this issue tend to take this as a starting point. For example, Cameron et al. (1999: 8) stated:

> '*Our central proposition is that gender is, perhaps unwittingly, embedded within the being of childcare institutions and childcare work ... [it] is widely understood to be, and is practiced as, women's work, something that women 'naturally' do ... childcare work has been modelled on a particular concept of care - 'mother-care''*.

In taking this particular understanding of the gendered practice, composition and power relations in nursery settings, through their research Cameron et al. (1999) explored what effect gender has on institutional relations amongst staff, between staff and parents, and in working with pre-school children. By doing this, a minority male presence in a predominantly female workforce was acknowledged. The study included 21 nursery staff and 77 parents, both males and females. The principal focus of the research was to investigate the experiences of male nursery workers and to understand better their reasons for entering a female dominated occupation. They were also interested in exploring the relationships men have with female colleagues, children and parents in everyday work and practice concerning 'gender in the workforce' (Cameron et al., 1999: 158) arguing:

> '*It is not only gendered by virtue of the distribution in the workforce but ideas on which the work is based are also infused with gendered understandings of roles ... the work is threaded with ideas about caring as substitute motherhood. This posed*

difficulties for men workers, whose role within childcare work is seen to be at odds with emulating motherhood'.

Their conclusion emphasises a 'caring as substitute motherhood' discourse, which could be seen as a binary gender division as they highlight the differences between men and women. For example, six male workers were described as 'good with children', 'playful', 'spontaneous', and 'fun'. These kinds of attributes could be entangled with theories of workers as co-constructors to develop new models of nursery workers' methods with young children that are less reliant on a model of nurturance, informed by ideologies of motherhood. This can be problematized for two reasons; firstly this 'alternative model' appears only available to men because women were not described as someone who is good with children, playful, spontaneous or fun (Nilsen and Manum 1998). Secondly, nurturance, caring and emotional labour are widely considered to be vital attributes for those working with young children (Moyles, 2001). This is despite Huppatz's (2009: 61) warnings that nursery workers can exploit the market mode as '*women [can] capitalize on their femininity and femaleness within these occupations in order to gain a steady and reasonable income'*. As Thomas (1993) argued, the meaning of 'care' is controversial. The concept of care tends to be presented as generic, 'when they are actually specific to, and within, either private or public domain' (p. 649). Thomas highlighted the dual meaning of 'care' such as caring *for* someone (such as nursery workers care for children) and caring *about* someone (such as nursery workers having developed caring feelings).

Other feminist writers, such as Osgood (2012), have been concerned with nursery workers' construction of professionalism and the interplay between gendered, classed and raced identities. Wider understanding about the construction of childhood and the role of women in early childhood and education in a global context has been addressed by Canella (1997), while Vincent and Braun's (2012) research was built on the concept of 'emotional labour' in relation to work with children, emphasising the importance of particular employment structures in order to understand workers' emotional labour.

2.4.2 Men in nurseries

The work of Cameron et al. (1999) was particularly relevant to explore the gendered nature of the ECEC and forms of marginalisation experiences among nursery workers. In their book, they argued that it is the predominant ideology of motherhood that has shaped and informed the understandings of nursery work. Whilst Cameron et al's (1999) study explored the gendered constructions of the nursery workers, Brody's (2014) qualitative study, with similar research aims involving six different European countries, showed that men have been moved into a position 'of removed experts'. By using the word 'expert', Brody (2014: 122) was already suggesting that gender drives the positioning of 'more than good'. His work was constructed around the belief that ECEC is 'women's' work where man has been considered '*to do something good [but] out of the ordinary*' when employed to work with young children. Despite the different countries and cultures, participants revealed many shared practices. For example, the men in his study spoke about the aspect of career decision and reported that they had backing from their family members. It was also reported that their families were surprised by their son's decision to work with young children as it was considered a job for women. Furthermore, when men joined the ECEC field, Brody reported that generally men were unaware of the threat of 'suspicion' of them being considered to be paedophiles, or to have some negative reasons for joining the ECEC workforce. They entered the profession believing they were making the right decision for themselves at the time. Piper and Smith (2003) also reported that this suspicion was constructed in part by moral panic around touching, holding and kissing in the nursery (Piper and Smith, 2003), and by the culture of fear regarding adults who demonstrate affection towards children (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015).

Other relevant research by Burn and Pratt-Adams (2015), carried out in England, was concerned with the work experiences of men (eleven in total) who teach children aged three to eleven years. They examined gender 'barriers' that men face when working with young children and argued that in primary schools there are 'unfair' gender practices that consistently try to reaffirm the 'good mother' and 'familial model' in staffing. Notwithstanding these insights, both Brody's (2014) and Burn and Pratt-Adams' (2015) studies were small scale qualitative studies, based on subjective experiences of male workers only.

In England, in the 1990s, there was a sense that men's employment in ECEC services was a risky area due to the series of child abuse scandals (Kitzinger, 2004). The question was

raised as to whether men or male workers should be encouraged at all to join the early years workforce. This belief started to shift when the government changed the rhetoric around male workers who were considered '*desirable to act as positive role models for boys*' (DfEE, 1997: 225; DfE, 2017b: 24). Males were seen as an underused pool of labour in the context of an expanding childcare market (EOC, 2003). As a result, government initiatives and targets to increase male recruitment in England were drafted (DfES, 2003). The intention was to tackle the 'gender imbalance' in the sector and make early education and childcare a viable career choice for all.

For example, The Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017b) recommended that more men should opt to work in the early years sector in order to increase the proportion of male staff in the workforce which has remained consistently low at three per cent for the last twenty years (Bonetti, 2018). This change in the policy approach is in line with public opinion. A survey conducted in 2012 by the Pre-school Learning Alliance showed that 98% of parents wanted more men to be involved in childcare (Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2012). Thornton and Bricheno (2006) identified that male workers in ECEC were not prevalent in the workforce and Cameron et al's (1999: 61) findings showed that men's 'token' status gives them a pay advantage. Not only do they have some pay advantages, men tend to progress faster than their female colleagues to leading positions (Miller, 2008). This situation appears little different, contemporaneously, as Bonetti's (2018; 2019) report shows that the gap between male and female employment in the ECEC sector has not narrowed, and that there are only three percent males working in the early years sector.

All these studies were concerned with differences in terms of gender. However, it could be argued that in order to understand the construction of the 'good' nursery worker, additional consideration should be given to examining factors other than biological gender that characterise their differences. These could include their individual/personal and professional experiences, motherhood, and qualification level along with others. Through this kind of analysis the 'mother substitute' model of nursery work has the potential either to be challenged or to be accepted with a more positive connotation attached to it. Consequently, nursery workers' individualities shaped the direction of the current research and, as a result, the analyses of the data reflect this concern.

2.5 Emotional labour in nursery work

The fourth theme was around the importance of attention to emotions (children and nursery staff), and about the emotional labour of nursery workers, and its possible consequences. This section examines the personal cost and benefits of emotional labour.

2.5.1 Emotional labour

Hochschild's (1983) influential work, *The Managed Heart, Commercialization of Human Feeling,* was the first to address the idea that work is not solely divided between dualism of the mind and body, but it may also incorporate substantial emotional work. Such work involves learning to manage one's own feelings in order to induce particular feelings in other people. Hochschild argued that, in human life, emotionality is an important function that contributes to successful relationships in which emotional labour is 'sold' within the labour market and is taken for granted. Hochschild (2003: 7) said that labouring required:

> '*… coordination of mind and feeling and it sometimes draws on a source of self … I use the term of emotional labour to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore exchange value. I use the synonymous terms emotion work or emotion management to refer to these same acts done in a private context where they have use value'.*

The idea of selling emotion for wage demonstrates the ways in which emotion is being objectified. When emotions are managed in fulfilment of a work role, emotional labour becomes part of the nursery services produced for the market. In this sense, emotions can be 'bought and sold' for financial gain. Hochschild (2003: 60) further argued that commercialisation of feelings requires workers to adhere to '*certain rules as a requirement of a role*', specifying the appropriateness of showing certain type of emotionality to the external world. On the other hand 'feeling rules' require the worker to secretly or privately deal with their emotions. In these rules, emotions, in private life and those in work life, demand the nursery worker to display different feelings to match those required. Hochschild's (2003) idea has generated debates about emotional labour, especially in care related work, where the existing discussions surrounding emotional labour have focused on the management and expression of emotions (Bolton, 2004; Van Laere et al., 2014). Bolton and Boyd (2003) criticized Hochschild's (2003) conceptualisation of emotion labour stating that it is too simplistic. They proposed further dimensions of emotional labour; *prescriptive,* where emotion management follows the

occupational feeling rules not necessarily for financial purposes, and *philanthropic* emotional management that follows the occupational feeling rules with the choice to engage more deeply in certain social interactions. Taggart (2011: 85) also argued that nursery workers need to demonstrate a '*critical understanding of their practice as emotion work'*.

2.5.2 How emotional labour is constructed in ECEC

Dunkel and Weihrich (2013) stipulated how emotional labour and working with feelings become integral parts of the everyday job, such as of those people who work in the nursery. Elfer (2008: 365), for example, discussed emotional labour in the context of the ECEC, describing how nursery workers manage their emotions:

> *'Nursery staff spoke of minimising possible feelings of exclusion, guilt or envy in parents by careful control of information given to them about their child's day. Staff were required to smile and look cheerful when parents were being showed around. There was also the labour managing emotions evoked by parents, sometimes nursery staff being idealised as 'loving children and having endless patience' when this is far from the subjective reality'.*

Elfer et al. (2012) further argued that the close and bonding relationship between the nursery worker and child promotes the child holistic development where the nursery worker is required insight into an emotional state of the child. Such an example of working with emotions is the key person attunement and emotional sensing of young children. Bowlby (1988: 194) described this as attachment which is a '*lasting psychological connectedness between human beings*'. It is a connection between the child and caregiver who recognises the need of the child and respond to that need with care and empathy. Boyer et al. (2012: 518) stated that this connection can be '*deeply gratifying and rewarding*' for the nursery workers '*despite being hard and emotionally draining*'. Boyer at al. (2012) researched five day care settings in the South of England, and conducted twenty-two interviews with nursery workers. Although their findings cannot be representative due to sample size and the narrow locality of the research, the findings showed that nursery workers can experience profound emotional connections with the children in their care. This raises a question of professionalisation of the workforce, as Miller (2008) suggested that nursery workers must balance their emotional investment to children and to their families with the maintenance of professional distance. The potential of deep commitment and their passion, Miller (2008) argued, undermines recognition of their professionalism and status.

Boler (1999: xviii) questioned as to why professionalism and scholarly disciplines '*erase, denigrate and devalue emotions*'. This sets up the argument about the 'absent presence' of emotions in professional lives, stating that it moves emotion away from the terrain of the unspeakable professional field into the territory of the spoken. Emotional labour in this sense refers to the behaviours, self-regulation and actions of the nursery workers in which behaviour is regulated deliberately. For example, Colley (2006) studied a group of trainee nursery workers with the aim of investigating how the education of nursery workers functions to prepare them for the field of work. Colley's (2006: 15) study was based on both quantitative and qualitative data gathered from participants who were studying on different childcare programmes in seventeen Further Education colleges. Her findings showed that that emotional labour carries costs for the nursery worker as it is '*controlled and exploited for profit by employers'*. She wrote about trainee experiences in placement where participants displayed pleasure working with children but also distress in dealing with challenging behaviour and how they had to manage their emotions. Suppression of emotion ranged from limiting their affection towards children to not showing annoyance and irritation. Colley (2006) and Vincent and Braun (2012) argued that expectations for emotional engagement, regulation and containment, should form part of the training for ECEC workers, where working-class students are encouraged to develop their responsible caring selves as respectable ECEC workers. These values can conflict with other internalised moral and social expectations of gendered caring work (Syed, 2008), and can impact the ways in which the workers view themselves and their practice. The challenge, therefore, for nursery workers remains to find ways of moving beyond deficit perceptions of ECEC as emotionally gendered and 'natural' for women. Taggart (2011: 85) argued that:

> *'…taking control of the professionalisation agenda therefore requires practitioners to demonstrate a critical understanding of their practice as emotional work'.*

A study by Vincent and Braun (2012) highlighted the importance of 'emotional engagement' when working with children. They investigated experiences of students who were training to become nursery workers and emphasised the importance of teaching students how to use emotional labour once in employment. They found that in the teaching, the aspect of emotional labour, including 'love' and 'passion' to work with children, was not addressed. As a result, Vincent and Braun (2012) argued for the official recognition of emotional labour, emphasising the possible effect that it may have on the

nursery workers. Similarly, Campbell-Barr et al. (2014; 2017) stipulated that '*emotional competences*' in ECEC requires compassion, empathy, affection and love through emotional connection with the children. According to Page (2018) there is a need for nursery workers to have a loving relationship with the children, and Boyer et al. (2012: 535) stated that there was '*deep affection and even love between care workers and children in day nurseries*'.

In nursing, however, research conducted by Lyth (1988) concluded that supressing emotions in the individual out of fear of not being seen as professional was a contributing factor to workplace stress. Lynch et al. (2009) further argued that care is a crucial kind of work for humans yet it is accorded low social status and material rewards. The dimension of care relates to the social characteristics defining a 'carer'. Thomas (1993) argued that carers might be defined in terms of familial roles such as wife and mother, and in terms of occupational or professional roles such as nurses and nursery workers.

Thomas (1993: 649) argued that 'caring about someone' is commonplace in social policy. Similarly, Page and Elfer (2013: 564) stipulated that caring and working with children is emotional, and '*such emotions should be seen as an inevitable aspect of this part of the work and not as an indication of professional or personal failure'*. They claimed that long periods of sustaining emotionally close interactions with very young children places high emotional demands on nursery workers.

Dahlberg et al. (2007: 45) provided an opposing view, stating that portraying nurseries as places of emotional closeness where emotional labour is seen as an 'intimacy' is *faux,* which can misleadingly combine a nursery environment with home environment. They further argued that the nursery should not be seen as 'home-from-home' nor should the nursery worker to be seen and regarded as 'substitute mother'. They strongly argued that the benefit of attending a nursery is that it offers:

> '… *something different but quite complementary, so the child gets the best of two [home and nursery] environments'*.

Osgood (2012: 113) also conducted ethnographic research in which three nurseries were involved. In this study, 24 participants were observed and interviewed. Participants addressed the issue of emotion as they talked about how to '*manage a caring self and emotionality in the right way*'. Osgood argued that the domesticated and emotional nature of nursery work is negatively constructed as an extension of mothering skills. As a result,

ECEC is still perceived as low skilled, low paid and highly feminised work and, as Canella (1997) stated, the work is linked to emotional labour, to the skills mothers 'naturally' have. Ruch (2012) put forward an argument for the growing need for emotional awareness of oneself and others to be able effectively to engage in care related work. Hochschild (1983), however, warned that the way in which emotional labour is managed is differently distributed by social status, class, and gender, where women in particular are required to do more emotional labour type of work than men.

2.5.2 Emotional labour as skilled work

Payne (2009), furthermore, opened up a critical discussion of the potential of emotional labour as skilled work that needs recognition and reward. With emotionally engaged work connected to care, it can be a challenge to have recognised the skills necessary to perform this work (James, 1989). This has been exemplified when Bolton (2004) debated the commodification of emotional labour, which reveals complex and nuanced views of how the skills workers develop are performed. Bolton (2004: 34) noted:

> *'Recognising emotional work as a social relationship, acted out on a material stage, gives the potential for worth to be restored to what is often an unequal exchange'.*

These wider dichotomies of care/education, skills/emotions and gendered work have been problematized by Osgood (2012), who argued that power relations promote academic knowledge (that is predominantly theoretical and masculine), and is more highly valued than (motherly feminine) pre-school-practices. This gendered dualism forms the basis of the skills' debate in service and care work, where men are generally employed in more managerial or technical roles than women (Nixon, 2009). Therefore, it can be argued that debates on emotional labour in ECEC are nuanced and complex due to the additional development of the organisational requirements of work in settings where both care and education are key components.

This study provides an opportunity to explore many of these similar issues in order to build on this literature.

2.6 Theoretical approach

As indicated previously in section 1.4, applying a feminist framework has guided thinking about the construction of the 'good' nursery work(er), and how it interlinks, for example, with gender, motherhood experiences, emotional labour and qualification.

Feminist theory facilitates the review of norms in relation to the nursery workers' practices. Weedon's (1997) book offered a clear account of feminist theory through which subjectivity, experiences of nursery worker, gender, and 'woman' can be examined in current UK society, and this was drawn upon as follows:

> *'As feminists we take as our starting point the patriarchal structure of society. The term patriarchal refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men. The power relations take many forms, from the sexual division of labour and the social organisation of procreation to the internalised norms of femininity by which we live' (Weedon, 1997: 2)*

Weedon (1997) emphasised the nature and social role of women who are defined in relation to a norm which is male. Weedon further argued that much of the British educational provision is organised on the assumption that women are 'equal but different' (p.2), stressing that women were seen as a separate group who are naturally equipped to fulfil different social functions, including being a wife and mother. Being a 'good wife' and 'good mother', Weedon argued, calls for particular qualities such as being naturally feminine, patient, emotional and self-sacrificing. Therefore, when a woman accesses the labour market, or enters the ECEC workforce, they were seen as best suited for this profession. This perception was based on gender differences that are 'viewed as individual characteristics that are contingent on time and place' (Weedon, 1997) and therefore, subject to historical and cultural variation.

A feminist framework, as Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002: 45) suggested, 'requires an understanding of the connection between the policies of the government'. This connection, by a feminist approach, can be linked to the practice of nursery workers, the ways in they interpret and address policies and how this influences their practice. These issues are explored and unpacked through the Foucauldian concept of 'power' and 'self', explained in section 3.5.

While Foucault (1988) has been criticised by feminist researchers such as Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) for not acknowledging gender in his writings, his work on power and self is useful when determining whether nursery workers reproduce and align their

behaviour with certain discourses, or resist them. Feminist framework, furthermore, considers biological determinism (Connell, 1987), and gendered inequalities (Davis and Gannon, 2006). It has been claimed that the reason for having gender categories (that are constantly constructed and reconstructed) in any social group, is that gender is a 'fundamental component of the structure of domination and subordination' (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990: 5). For example, the competence of men and women as gendered begins with how well they demonstrate qualities that are associated with femaleness and maleness. Davies (1989) further claimed that those who adopt identities outside the dominant versions of gender (male v female), that is, those who do not perform within the socially accepted boundaries of masculinity and femininity, risk marginalisation. For example, understanding sex-role stereotyping tends to reinforce the biological understanding of being female and male. In terms of ECEC, the employment of males in nurseries is not always considered 'normal'. Male nursery workers are often treated with scepticism and, in this context, the status of the gender group is not equal. Connell (1995) argued that what men do tends to be valued more highly than the occupations of women, not only in terms of power but also in relation to economic rewards.

Examining the aims of this research through a feminist approach, but also applying Foucauldian concept of 'power' and 'self can, therefore, illuminate the ways in which the 'good' nursery worker is constructed in current political and localised settings. By doing so, the dominant beliefs in ECEC can be disrupted, such as it is 'natural' for women to work with children, or seeing nursery work as an extension of motherhood.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has identified and outlined the key literature and the theoretical approach that influenced the study. The first theme addressed ECEC policy developments and implications, and issues around preparing young children to become 'school ready'. The process of the professionalisation of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce was explained and critically analysed, including an explanation of the complex nature of qualification requirements for working with 0-5 year old children in England. The literature also specified that the work that nursery workers do is shaped and regulated by policies in terms of qualification requirement which remains unclear for those who work with children.

The second theme addressed the implication for nurseries of an increased labour participation by working mothers. It highlighted that a growing body of literature relates to research undertaken with parents, mainly mothers, who use the childcare service.

The third theme explored the highly gendered composition of the workforce. This aspect of ECEC has attracted much attention and is widely considered to be an important factor, shaping the ways in which the occupation of nursery workers is viewed, and the status which is attached to nursery work in terms of pay and poor working conditions. Connection between the gendered composition of the ECEC workforce, and 'feminised' nursery workers' role was considered.

The fourth theme explored emotional labour as an aspect of nursery work. Relatively little has been published in relation to the ECEC and emotional labour. The published literature concerned with emotional labour talks about reward and exhaustion (Boyer et al.,2012) as well as the ways in which nursery workers need to manage their emotions (Elfer, 2008), while Page and Elfer (2013) reported high emotional demands from nursery workers. It was identified and acknowledged that emotional labour and emotional turn in care work is still a concern with specific reference to emotional labour being seen as skilled work. This is due to policies which often neglect the important role of emotional excess in professional practices.

The last section examined and explained the theoretical framework which is how feminism operates in ECEC practices. It describes the notion that the construction of gender occurs together with other aspects of personal identity and that society tends to prescribe behaviour according to gender differences (or to the gender of the individual). The tacit acceptance of gender roles informs an understanding of 'good' practices in the nursery.

Having explored the key themes, the review of the literature revealed gaps in the literature, showing that certain aspects of nursery work have been under-researched. For example, while the emotional wellbeing of children was well researched, nursery workers' emotional investment in their job needs further attention.

The influence of key authors within the field of the ECEC, such as Osgood (2005; 2006; 2010; 2012), Moss (2006; 2007; 2008; 2010; 2017; 2019), Urban (2008; 2010), Elfer (2012; 2008) and Campbell-Barr (2014; 2017; 2019) on the study has been twofold. Firstly, they have helped to frame the background of the participants in the study (most of

the participants were women/mothers) and secondly, they facilitate an understanding of the policy implications for practice. The next chapter sets out the research design and methods for the empirical study, with discussion of the methodological and ethical decisions and potential limitations.

Chapter 3: Methodology, design and methods

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research methodology adopted for this study and the theory that underpins the investigation of 22 nursery workers' lived experience. The study specifically aimed to explore how nursery workers construct the 'good' nursery work(er) in relation to the qualifications of staff, and to the 'feminised' nature of the work. The chapter begins with the research question, aims and justification of the chosen methodology, which is followed by the review of the ontology and epistemology. Ethics underpinning the study, recruitment and sampling of participants is explained as well as the methods of data collection and methods of data analysis. The final section in this chapter discusses issues of quality and rigour.

3.2 Aims and research question

In Chapter 2, the literature review revealed the complexity of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce in England, and addressed key issues relating to the historical context in understanding the early years workforce, their (lack of) qualification requirements, parental choice of childcare, and the gendered nature of the work. The historical divide between childcare and education and the 'feminisation' of nursery work have contributed to the development of an ECEC workforce that is marginalised (Moss, 2019), low paid, less skilled (Bonetti, 2018; 2019), and has lower status than other workers across the education system in England such as teaching assistants and teachers (Urban et al., 2012). To investigate the current trend of the workforce and the historical divide between childcare and education, the aims of the research are to:

- Identify and analyse discourses of 'good' nursery workers in relation to the policy documents and qualification.
- Explore the ways in which the notion of the 'good' nursery worker is gendered in relation to caring experiences.

As a result of these aims the following research question was posed:

What makes a 'good' nursery work(er)?

3.3 Methodological approach

The focus of this study is to learn about the experiences and views of nursery worker and, through these, the research aim was to ascertain their understanding of how 'good' nursery work was constructed. Sartre (1964: 92) stated that a narrative approach to research is rooted in people's experiences:

> *'People are always tellers of tales. They live surrounded by their stories and the stories of others; they see everything that happens to them through those stories and they try to live their lives as if they were recounting them'.*

As Sartre's quote indicates, life is part and parcel of the stories participants tell (Gilbert, 2008). Similarly, Earthy and Cronin (2008: 438) stated that '*narrative research can offer insights into deeply held cultural values and assumptions*' while Andrews (2014: 2) claimed that experiences captured through narratives '*carry traces of human lives that we want to understand*'. Gubrium and Holstein (2001) further suggested that by exposing and addressing women's experiences, their 'invisibility' as social actors can be captured which has been one of the feminist researchers' important accomplishments.

Narrative inquiry has gained an increasingly high profile in social research (Squire et a. 2014) and in recent research within the field of early years; for example, Osgood (2012) undertook narrative research on professionalisation of the early years workforce and their identity formation, and Davies and Gannon (2006) adopted a narrative approach to understand masculinity in education.

A narrative approach to research was well suited to address the research aims, as it allowed the privileging of participants issues, voices and experiences. Not only can rich and varied experiences of people be collected in their social context but, as Butch and Staller (2014) suggested, the emotive and personal language can be captured. Even when nursery workers' role sounds familiar for many, there is a possibility to analyse and present aspects of their every-day life that challenge common sense ideas about these people, and about the places in which they work.

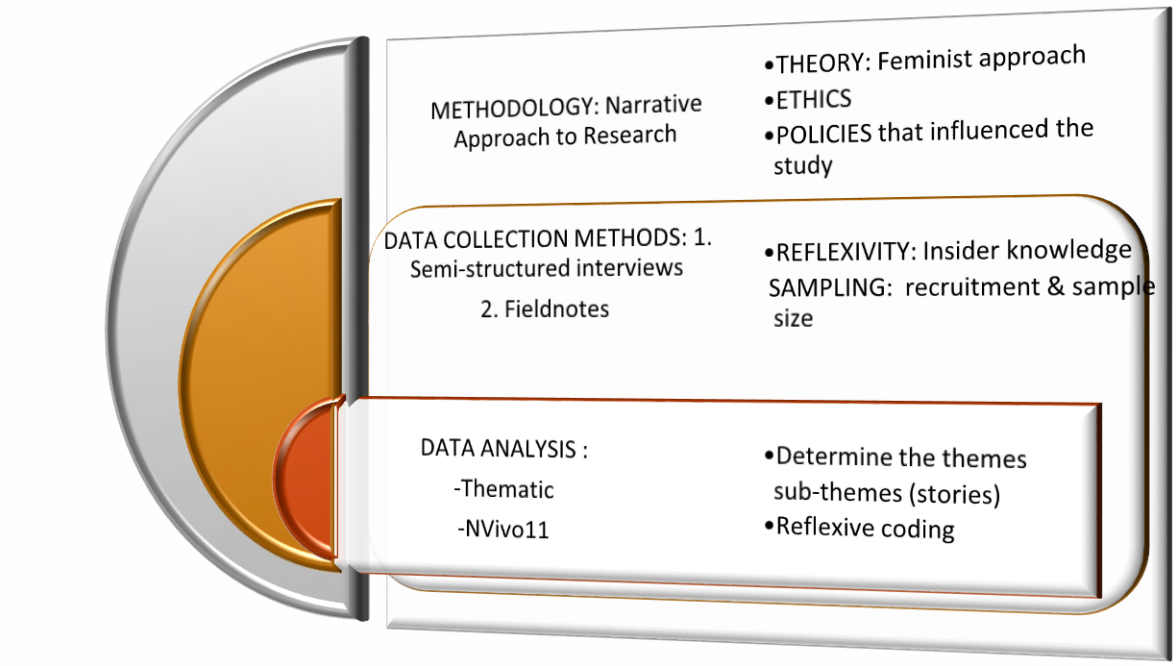
Within narrative approach the focus was on participants' 'stories'. Stories, according to Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008), are snippets of often routine or everyday talk in interviews, which tell of past, current, imagined, or hypothetical events, as opposed to 'big' narratives like life histories and those compiled from multiple interviews. Stories are conceptualised as '*interactive engagements*' and as a '*strip of discourse activity*'

(Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008: 380) in which people '*construct a sense of who they are*', enabling a focus on how characters and the narrator are positioned and how the 'self' (or narrator) is positioned with regard to dominant discourses (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008: 385). Investigating participants' stories within a narrative approach to research is particularly relevant for this research, in which the stories enable an exploration of how understandings of good practice are socially constructed in time and space through the narratives that nursery workers might tell.

3.4 Visualising the methodology

To address the complexity of a qualitative, narrative approach to research, in Figure 1 the factors that needed to be considered are presented. As Figure 1 shows, 'policies' are placed next to the 'theory' as both theory and policy inform the study and how data were analysed (see section 3.10.1). In preparation for the data collection stage, and in order to contextualise the study, two key policy documents were included: the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2014a) and The Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017b). These documents not only contextualised the research, but also helped to examine the interconnection between nursery practice and how policy shaped this practice. By doing so, it enabled the identification and exploration of the government vision about the early years' workforce over time.

Figure 1. Methodology adopted for this research



3.5 The purpose of a feminist framework

Weedon (1997) suggested that research that is carried out from a perspective addresses a number of issues that 'traditional' research might not consider. Feminist theory considers gendered inequalities (Davies, 2008); feminist framework fits the analysis of the concept of care and nursery work since it can illuminate the experiences of nursery workers who are mostly female. From data collection to data analysis and interpretation, the process by which the research was conducted centralised the relationship between the researcher and researched in order to balance differing levels of power and possible authority. Due to the nature of the work, which can be compared with mothers' labour, by drawing upon a feminist methodological approach to research, this can give voice to nursery workers through their experiences. Weedon's (1997: 33) writing offers a contextualisation for exploring experiences using feminist theory, stating that:

> *'…experience has no inherent essential meaning. It may be given meaning in language through a range of discursive systems of meaning which are often contradictory and constitute conflicting versions of social reality, which in turn serve conflicting interests'* (*Weedon, 1997: 33).*

Social reality is thus formed through individuals' experiences and locations, and in feminist terms the notion of 'truth' is 'temporary, intellectually, politically and emotionally grounded and this is contextually specific to those researched' (Stanley, 1990: 23). Therefore, it is important to recognise that this study is not concerned with identifying an authentic 'truth' but aims to investigate nursery workers' experiences (see section 3.4). Since individuals have multiple identities that are influenced by their localised setting and their family background, the feminist approach allows the complexity of these layers to be investigated.

Since I am also interested in understanding how nursery workers interpret policies, and how policies influence their practice, I used the Foucauldian concept of 'power' and 'self'. Foucault argued a number of points in relation to power and offers several definitions of power over time. He said that 'power is not a thing but a relation' (Foucault, 1988: 32), that 'power is not simply repressive but it is productive' and it 'operates at the most micro levels of social relations' (Foucault, 2001: 121). Furthermore, Foucault claimed that a mechanism of power regulates the behaviour of individuals within a social context which relates to how it impacts people's behaviour. Foucault's notion of power, in this sense, supports those to explore the often complicated ways in which

women's experiences, self-understandings, and conducts are constructed by the power relations. To consider the behaviour of nursery workers, Foucault's (1988) work on ethics and self was relevant as for Foucault, ethics concerns the kind of relation one has with oneself (also see section 3.9). Foucault suggested that there are four aspects to how the individual constitutes him/herself as the moral subject of his/her own actions. The first aspect relates to the part of the individual which acts as the focus of moral conduct. The second aspect concerns what makes an individual recognize their moral obligations. The third aspect relates to the means by which individuals transform and work on themselves. The fourth aspect concerns what sort of person an individual might want to be. Foucault (2000: 36) states that, 'the concern for the self is linked to the exercise of power'. This theoretical model can be applied to examine the role of nursery workers who, through policy workforce reform and related practices of constant scrutiny, find that the way in which power is exercised is largely invisible. At the same time nursery workers embrace 'ethics of care', recognising the importance of supporting and protecting children and families. However, whether the power is visible or not, it is ultimately so 'abstract' that it becomes difficult to challenge or negotiate. Francis (2001) for example noted that as well as positioning ourselves and others through discourse we are simultaneously being positioned by others, and that such positioning is beyond our control, so that:

> *'... the self-incorporates both contradiction and consistency; is constructed by the self and by others; and has agency but is also determined by discursive material forces. This account is flexible, able to incorporate the contradictory and complex nature of human interaction and power relations' (Francis, 2001:166).*

Thus, in a quest to conform to dominant constructions of good nursery practices, practitioners become regulated by policies and government expectations. By recognising, identifying and problematising the discourses through which nursery workers are positioned, possibilities exist to develop critical consciousness and to challenge current self-understandings. As a consequence, as Francis (2001) suggests, the feminist aim of establishing a space for new forms of subjectivity and resistance can be achieved.

3.6 Ontological approach

The ontological perspective of a theory considers what counts as 'truth', as mentioned in section 3.3. Feminist ontology rejects objectivity and a single definitive 'truth' (Hawkesworth, 2012). Foucault (1997) also claimed that there is no absolute objective truth, but instead truths are discourses accepted by society as meaningful. As society is

fluid, these discourses will evolve. Individuals in this study, that is nursery workers, are seen as social actors who are variously located within their settings; therefore a variety of local 'truths' will undoubtedly produce a plurality of meanings of 'good' nursery practice upon which knowledge is formed. Thus, the individuals' accounts could be regarded as accurate representations of their subjective experiences (Andrews et al., 2013) that were shaped by their personal and professional background, culture, and gender. This positioning offers an alternative approach to the understanding of both the production and analysis of qualitative data by addressing the multi-layered 'meanings' given by the participants within a certain social situation in a particular place and time (Square et a., 2014). Notions of 'truth' obtained through objective, positivist methodology such as surveys were therefore dismissed. My positionality in terms of the concerns arising with a qualitative approach to research is addressed at length in section 3.8, and Figure 2 in that section also supports my positioning where I visualise the multi-layered task and role of the researcher in feminist research. In addition, in section 3.9, with respect to the ethical implications in feminist research, I describe how feminist ethics endorse a non-hierarchical standard, emphasizing care, compassion, connectedness, and collaboration between researchers and participants.

3.7 Epistemological approach

A theory's epistemology concerns itself with what is regarded as knowledge. Feminist epistemology claims that personal knowledge is directed and grounded upon individual experiences (Oakley, 1981). Therefore, a section on epistemology is important for several reasons. Firstly, the nature of knowledge, and the nature of sociality are central to feminist thinking. Secondly, it is important to illuminate which knowledge and phenomena are deemed valid topics for research and consequently worthy of recognition.

Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) warned that the process of knowledge production in feminist work has ethical implications; therefore the definition of knowledge by Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002: 65) was adopted for this study in which:

> '*Knowledge is a historical product of the social life that is shaped by theory, culture and ideas but does not come only from theory or language. So, from this perspective, it can be argued that individuals are constantly in a process of subjectification, where 'knowledge' and 'truth' are understood to be interpretations held by the individuals'.*

'Discovering' the meaning making is then underpinned by personal experience of reality, which is seen as a process of knowledge production (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002) and subjectification (Davies and Gannon, 2011). These experiences are shaped by the participants' individuality, professionalism, background, culture, religion and gender that results in constructing knowledge and truths about the world and 'self' (Foucault 1988).

Given the interpretive approach in knowledge production, it is important to clarify the nature of the relationship that I, as the researcher, had with the participants (Hesse-Biber, 2012). My current academic identity is a result of a complex interaction between the multi-cultural environments I have grown up in, the educational institutions I have attended, and my ethnic and professional identity. I am a mother of two, and I started working in the nursery after giving birth to both of my children; I am a White woman, but I am not White British, as were the large majority of the participants. At the beginning of the Yugoslavian war in 1992, I came to live and work in the UK. I draw on Ozbilgin and Woodward's (2004: 668) idea of 'othering' that makes it possible to understand the meaning of 'otherness'. They stated that 'othering' refers to:

> *'Dualistic processes by which the normative and deviant, centres and margins, core and periphery and powerful and powerless are identified and differentiated'.*

This definition highlighted my second layer of the 'othering', and that is the way I speak, write and conduct myself. I argue that 'otherness' influences the knowledge production. Therefore, as a feminist novice researcher, it is important to understand the experiences of the individual nursery worker as well as mine, and understand the connection between the knowledge created by the government and that of nursery workers, which then becomes the nursery's responsibility to put into practice. This process requires an understanding of the purpose of the policy and its interpretation.

To recognise the significance of the policy and the impact policy has made on the practice, themes were created from re-occurring topics of policy that emerged from the data. For example, in the process of constructing knowledge, the role of the researcher comes to the forefront. It cannot be assumed that the researcher is free from the problematic nature of interpretation of the data (Riessman, 2000; 2008). While I intend to bring to the front the nursery workers' experiences, I also recognise that, like all qualitative researchers, I bring my own perspectives when interpreting the researched experience. Since I had years of experience working in the childcare field, this research has been a particular challenge as I had to be mindful of my ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of

the professional experience participants talked about. As a researcher who has worked in similar environments to the participants, my understanding about that environment was greater than for someone who had never worked in the ECEC field. For example, having experienced Ofsted inspections myself, I could instantly understand what it really meant being 'Ofsted ready', or to be addressing the issue of how to implement new legislation. From this perspective I can be described as an 'insider' researcher (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; 2003). Floyd and Arthur (2012: 174) debated the '*level of insiderness'* especially when conducting education doctoral research, as in this case, where the student is encouraged to research their own or relevant practice. It has been claimed by Mauthner and Doucet (2003) that insider status may confer privileged access and information, but the researcher's position in an organisation may also act as a constraint, limiting who is willing to participate.

Although I had experience working in the setting and can relate to the participants' experiences especially when talking about poor working conditions, or low paid jobs, my experiences were more than a decade ago and the participants were recruited outside of the organisation I am currently employed within. hooks (2000) suggested that those who have experienced marginalization themselves are particularly suited to conducting interpretive and critical feminist research; therefore it can be argued that in this case my experience of working in nurseries can be beneficial to this study.

Weedon's (1997) suggestion that subject positioning signifies how individuals identify themselves and their place in society has been followed in this research (see section 3.6). Weedon (1997: 15) conceptualised this as '*the relationship between language, social institutions and individual consciousness*'. Therefore the ways in which I position myself in understanding the data give a specific flavour which is explored in Chapter 4, where I consider discourses surrounding professionalism, and the ways in which 'good nursery work' manifests in relation to the EYFS (DfE, 2014a; 2017a).

3.8 Reflexivity and positioning

Since the project is situated within the feminist framework, reflexivity lies at the heart of the feminist research (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002; Corlett and Mavin, 2018). This means acknowledging the critical role the researcher plays in collecting and interpreting the data. For instance, reflexive writing is discussed in a wide range of literature within narrative inquiry and constructionist narrative analysis (Riessman, 2000; Esin et al., 2014),

where it is suggested that a narrative approach consists of not only the story-telling component but also the social interactions between the interviewer and interviewee. This is in line with Mauthner and Doucet's (1998: 122) view which states that reflection and understanding means '*I, as a researcher, making explicit where I am located in relation to my research respondents'*. In other words, it should be made clear what the researcher's cultural, personal, political and intellectual stance is. Since reflexivity is characteristic of feminist research (Oakley, 1981), this study will help me to understand more about my own personal, political, and professional positioning, such as where I am in relation to my research respondents (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). For example, when positioning myself as a researcher, I found it a difficult balance between analysing the narratives on the practice of the nursery workers and, at the same time, avoiding making judgements. This was due, firstly, to being a migrant mother of two children who attended a day care setting in England, where I gained insight into the ways in which a parent can experience the practice. Secondly, as an experienced nursery worker abroad and in England, I recall working for long hours with little pay. Denzin (2014) warned that this kind of subjective reflexivity can be a trap as it may produce dramatic conceptions of the meaning making and interpretation of the data. I particularly struggled to overcome the professional practice-based knowledge as I have considerable experience of working in nurseries.

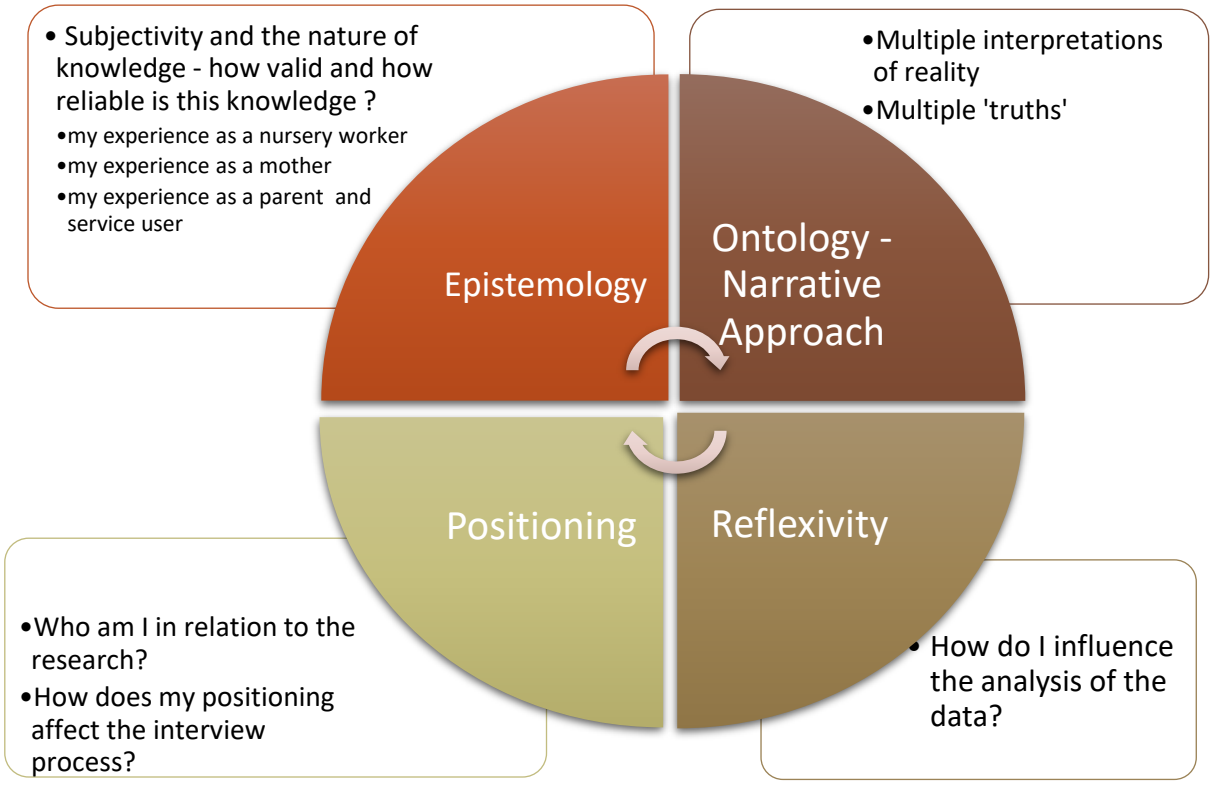
Since my sources of data production are people, the ways in which power operates needs some attention as power can impact both the researcher and researched (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002). No research is free from the knowledge of the researcher (Denzin, 2014) and therefore it requires the researcher to be aware of their own subjectivity and how is created.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that there is a possibility that the researcher will try to 'reconstruct' the reality of the respondents. This may pose questions such as how would participants respond to social similarities and differences between themselves and the researcher? Further, how may the social positioning of the researcher affect the interview exchange? According to Miller and Glassner (2011), a researcher must consider the following question: 'Do I need to be a member of the group I am researching to truly understand their life experiences?' Or, would these social differences help gain an understanding about different perspectives? Therefore, as stated by Drake (2010: 88), '*reflexivity in action'* is paramount, and, as the researcher, I needed to reflect on '*what*

frames (my) seeing' and critically look at what I chose to make visible in my analysis of the data.

To guide the understanding of the epistemological, ontological approach, and importance of reflexivity and positioning in research, the diagram produced by Pitard (2017) was developed further (see Figure 2). Pitard claimed that for a reader to trust the perspective of a researcher in qualitative study, the disclosure of the researcher's position in relation to the data is vital.

Figure 2. The epistemological and ontological approach, reflexivity and personal positioning (Adapted from Pitard, 2017)



3.9 Ethical implications in feminist research

In feminist research, ensuring that ethical principles are upheld is an on-going process so it is necessary for the researcher to reflect continually on their own practice as a researcher. Balancing feminist research principles as well as maintaining a feminist understanding of the well-being of the researcher and participants leads to careful consideration of both. Feminist researchers are concerned not only with 'truth' but also with who produces the knowledge. This entails being mindful that knowledge from a feminist standpoint is always partial knowledge due to the researcher's interpretation of social reality

(Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002). Furthermore, when research is informed by feminist principles, ethical considerations should be situated within this framework. Such a framework is concerned not only with '*practices of governing others but also practices of the self'* (Dean, 2010: 5). This makes it possible to bring out the autonomy of the subject and its relationship to others, and is what constitutes ethical work. Furthermore, he argued that these practices were not designed by the subject (in this case the nursery worker) but by '*society, culture, and social group*'. (Therefore, in forming the relationship between nursery workers, children and their parents, using feminist principles, this emphasises that the relationship is not static but a process of negotiation that needs to be seen as important rather than the codes of behaviour themselves. For Foucault, ethics is a:

> *'Process in which the individual delimits that part of himself [sic] that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve and transform himself'.* (Foucault, 1984: 28)

Drawing on the definition above, in this study, feminist ethics endorse a non-hierarchical standard, emphasizing care, compassion, connectedness, and collaboration between researchers and participants. Participants have the right to know they are being researched and to be informed about the nature of the research. Thus, I provided the participants with the information sheet (Appendix 3) which explained the purpose of the research. Given the potential risk of harm for participants and researchers while conducting feminist interviews, strategies were designed in such a way to help empower rather than simply protect the participants (Hesse-Biber, 2014). For example, in section 3.11.3 I gave an example when during the interview process one of the participant became distressed by the interview, in particular by her memories of difficult times as a mother which was central to her life.

Feminist scholars have advanced several strategies for reducing power differentials between researchers and participants. One such strategy is researcher reflexivity, or the act of interrogating and examining how one's own social characteristics intercede in and inform the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2014). The reflexive process, during which 'awareness' of how elements of participants' background are developed, can shape the research experience, and are a critical component of feminist research. For example, Hesse-Biber (2014: 184) noted that:

> *'As a feminist interviewer, I am aware of the nature of my relationship to those whom I interview, careful to understand my particular personal and researcher standpoints and to understand what role(s) I play in the interview process in terms of my power and authority over the interview situation.'*

In practical terms this meant being alert to and recognising any distress or uncomfortable situation by reading facial expressions or body language during the interview process. By being overtly reflexive and reciprocal, the neutralisation of a potential hierarchical power relation between myself, as the researcher, and the participants was partially achieved. Furthermore, in adherence with BERA (2011; 2017) guidelines and those of the university, participants were asked to give voluntary informed consent, prior to the start of the research, by signing a consent form (Appendix 4).

Explanations were given that the data would be held securely and that participants had the right to withdraw from the research for any, or no reason, up to the point before their anonymised data had been analysed. Participants were informed that the research complied with the legal requirements in relation to storage and use of personal data, as set down in the Data Protection Act (1998; 2018). However, it was made clear that the fact that the research was conducted in the southeast of England would be disclosed, and that the anonymised findings would be used for publication purposes.

3.10 Sampling

This section explains how the sample group was recruited, acknowledging the role of gatekeepers.

3.10.1 Recruitment of the sample group

To undertake the study, suitable sample groups needed to be identified. First, as Savin-Baden and Howell-Major (2013) pointed out, participants must be able to provide information that in turn will address the research questions set for the research, so it was essential that participants were working in an early years' sector. Second, due to the use of qualitative interviews, I was mindful of the number of participants I planned to interview, as organising the interviews and transcribing the data would be time consuming (Somekh and Lewin, 2011; Silverman, 2014).

To tackle these challenges, I approached the Early Years Network Officer at the local authority where I am currently living and working to negotiate access to nurseries. Since the officer is the person who organises the network meeting, I asked if she could present

my research aims to a collection of nursery and children centre representatives, and other early years' professionals who attend. I was aware that within this local authority there were over forty nurseries, so this assured a degree of anonymity to both the nurseries and the individual participants. I also recognised that the participants who contacted me would probably be those occupying senior positions, but I anticipated that there would still be diversity among them in terms of their qualification level, experience and job role. My expectation was that most of the participants would be White British, but I hoped that the considerable socio-economic diversity of the local authority would be reflected in the sample group as these attributes are key factors informing the meaning making of narratives. This would enable me to investigate the construction of 'good' nursery workers from different angles and perspectives. However, as explained later in this section, this was not achieved.

Once the Early Years Network Officer had been contacted, I provided her with my contact details and an information letter (Appendix 3) about the research which clearly stated that the project had gained ethical clearance. The Network Officer agreed to act on my request. Consequently, twelve interested owners and nursery managers, and one senior nursery worker, contacted me and agreed to participate in the research and, from February 2015, when the study gained ethical approval, to July 2015, I interviewed these twelve individuals.

After close analysis of the people who initially came forward, I noted that the participants were all mothers, and in senior positions within the nurseries in which either they were employed or they owned. However, as I sought a more diverse range of participants in terms of qualification level, gender and experiences, I decided to negotiate access to the nurseries through the group of people who had already come forward, thus adopting a snowballing technique. Most of these participants invited me to the setting in which they worked, indicating who they thought would be useful for me to interview, since I specified that I particularly sought individuals who were not parents, and did not hold a degree. This step was important in allowing different and varied discourses to emerge (through the spoken word/voice) and it provided the opportunity for multiple constructions of 'good' to materialise.

Furthermore, I was particularly interested in interviewing male nursery workers as men working with children is still a rarity, as explained in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 (Bonetti, 2018). Two male managers came forward to take part in this study who were directly

working with the children. It proved difficult to recruit more men. This was due to the small proportion of men working in the sector; they form only three percent of the total ECEC workforce (Bonetti, 2019). When, through snowballing technique, a male trainee practitioner came forward, the manager thought that this individual did not have the appropriate experience to answer my questions as he was an apprentice. I had no other option but to accept this manager's view.

Table1 provides details of the sample of participants included in this project. Out of twenty-two participants only one had an L2 qualification, ten had L3, three had L5, four had L6, and 3 had L7 qualification. Sixteen participants were in senior roles such as managers or room leaders, and, out of those sixteen, four participants were owners or co-owners. Six who took part in this research were nursery workers. The age range varied between twenty-one and fifty-three years of age.

The first three interviews gave the opportunity to strengthen the subsequent interviews in terms of testing the interview questions. Data from these interviews were merged with the remaining interviews. Following the BERA (2018) guidelines, I explained to the participants in the study that their names and the name of the nursery they were employed at would not be mentioned; instead I would use pseudonyms.

Table 1. Participants' background – gender, age, parenthood, qualification level and job role

	Gender	Age	Parent	Qualification	Job Role
Gill	F	43	Yes	L7	Co-owner / Nursery Manager
Edith	F	36	Yes	L3	Deputy Manager
Tiana	F	44	Yes	L3	Nursery Worker
Sharon	F	48	Yes	L3	Owner / Nursery Manager
Denise	F	49	Yes	L5	Deputy Nursery Manager
Trudie	F	48	Yes	L6	Owner / Nursery Manager
Val	F	32	Yes	L5	Deputy Manager
Sandra	F	27	No	L5	Nursery Worker
Bea	F	53	Yes	L7	Assessor/Nursery Manager
Gemma	F	34	Yes	L6	Room Leader
Alexander	M	30	Yes	L3	Co-owner / Nursery Manager
Claire	F	49	Yes	L7	Nursery Worker
Susan	F	36	Yes	L3	Room Leader
Chris	M	40	Yes	L6	Nursery Manager
Sue	F	37	Yes	L6	Deputy Manager
Ruth	F	20	No	L2	Nursery Worker
Joyce	F	26	No	L3	Room Leader
Emma	F	21	No	L3	Room Leader
Linda	F	28	No	L3	Room Leader
Melissa	F	20	No	L3	Nursery Worker
Rosa	F	52	No	L3	Room Leader
Ana	F	23	No	L3	Nursery Worker

3.10.2 Sample size

Since this research was undertaken within the qualitative paradigm, the aim was not to generalise but to illuminate and understand the complex issues of life experiences. Somekh and Lewin (2011) suggested that, within qualitative research, some of the qualitative data are 'richer' than others, and that determining the 'saturation' point is

difficult as the term is inconsistently applied. They further argued that some researchers tend to demonstrate a low level of transparency regarding sample sizes; instead such researchers claim saturation has been achieved in order to justify a small sample. Indeed, it is hard to determine in any qualitative research study when to stop interviewing, so I followed a commonly stated principle for determining sample size in a qualitative study, which is that the number of participants should be sufficiently large and varied to elucidate the aims of the study (Silverman, 2014). The data were collected from a relatively diverse range of nursery workers in terms of their role, those who were parents, non-parents, males and females. Out of twenty-two participants, only three were migrant nursery workers. Consequently, I felt that I had gathered rich data which would be sufficient to address the research aims and question.

Although the simple size was diverse, it is important to highlight that there were some limitations in recruiting this sample. As mentioned earlier, in order to collect more diverse qualitative data, I approached a number of nursery managers to gain access to their staff. Whilst access was given to the nursery, I was denied the possibility to interview practitioners on a random basis; instead, I was recommended which members of staff to approach.

3.11 Methods of data collection: interviews and fieldnotes

In order to address the aims of the study, appropriate methods were used to align with the feminist methodological framework already identified. This was best achieved by gathering data through two methods, namely semi-structured interviews and fieldnotes.

3.11.1 Semi-structured interviews

Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) and Mauthner and Doucet (2003) suggested that interviews are the most common form of data collection in qualitative research, especially when research is not just on the participants but also for them, that is, when research is aimed at being of benefit for those researched. To address the study aims, a more open approach to data collection than surveys and structured interviews was required as it offered greater flexibility, hence the choice of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews gave an opportunity to engage with the participants, and to probe the answers when needed. I have taken the feminist position which argues that the interview is an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, with both participants creating and (co)constructing versions of the social world (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

I was also mindful of the ethical issues this method may bring, as qualitative interviews often represent an interruption within a participant's life (Coleman and Briggs, 2007). Blackman (2007) clearly illustrated this by reflecting on his experience of researching domestic violence. When he was in the presence of distress his senses were shaken. He reported that the research participants allowed him into their lives to share narratives; he faced moral issues as he could not be their friend, but they shared 'friendship moments' through honesty, a sort of 'grounded empathy'. The problem of the blur between '*research friendship and friendship'* was also explored by Cotterill (1992: 599), while Duncombe and Jessop (2012: 109) built on this idea, stating that '*faking friendships*' would be immoral and unethical. This made me more aware that the seemingly straightforward technique needed to be carefully considered in terms of my positioning in the interview process. Whilst interviewing I was constantly aware of the dangers of not developing fake friendships and, on reflection, this did not seem to have been an issue in any of the interviews. Regarding the concern about coping with distress within an interview, in section 3.11.3, I provide an example of how I dealt with an unexpected situation when a participant burst into tears during the interview.

The aim of the study was not to generalise to a larger population but to scrutinise complex and sometimes contradictory narratives of professional, caring, and gendered practices. In the current study, my ontological assumptions about the experiences participants have within the nurseries had to be considered (see section 3.5 and 3.6). The semi-structured nature of the interview provided opportunities to explore in depth certain topics. For example, among other important topics, this method gave a platform to question and to explore in more depth the issue of the staff–children ratio, and the way in which the new EYFS (DfE, 2014a) was understood.

Here, it was important to acknowledge that, out of the twenty-two participants, three were migrant nursery workers who had similar educational backgrounds and professional experiences in England to me. Drake (2010) explained that the identity of the researcher is likely to influence the research. The experience of interviewing these individuals gave the study another dimension as I felt that the participants were occasionally very conscious about how, what and to whom their story was being told, paying additional attention to ensure that they answered my questions in detail. This may have been because they believed that, due to my background, I would understand their lives better.

3.11.2 The interview schedules and participants

There were two different interview schedules (Appendix 5 and 6) designed for different job roles (manager/owners and staff). This was to ensure that opinions were elicited appropriately from all participants on the main topics of interest to this research. Before the interview took place general background information was collected (Appendix 7). In total, 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted, involving fifteen different nurseries. Of those twenty-two participants, there were twenty females (of whom 13 were mothers) and two males (both of whom were fathers). The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and one hour and were guided by the interview schedules (see Appendices 4 and 5) that covered the same broad topics:

- Interviewee's career trajectory/relationship to early childhood education and care;
- Background of the organisation and the nursery worker role;
- Exploration of views on qualifications, experiences, and motherhood/fatherhood in early childhood education and care;
- Nursery workers' predictions for the future of early childhood education and care under the current Conservative government.

3.11.3 Fieldnotes

Many researchers suggest using fieldnotes. These are written observations and thoughts recorded immediately following the interview and are considered critical to understanding issues encountered in the field (Stanley, 2013; Allen, 2017). Following this suggestion I wrote fieldnotes over a period of one year, including recording my experiences as a novice researcher, my reflections on the interview process, and initial thoughts about what was said. For example, after an interview with a nursery owner I wrote:

> '*It was a very challenging interview. I wasn't expecting her to cry and to burst into emotional meltdown purely from my question which was around her decision to open her own nursery… She drew on her experience of her personal/emotional memories of having difficulties becoming pregnant and then leaving her own child in the care of others/other mothers'*. [Fieldnote, 2016:3]

The personal statement of the participant in the interview highlighted the complexity of understanding emotional experiences and ethics fully. I immediately stopped the interview, offered her a glass of water and asked if she wanted to take a break. I turned off the audio recorder and reminded her that she did not need to continue with the interview. I

also explained that I would be happy to travel to her setting again if she preferred to continue at a later date. After a few minutes, she reassured me that she was fine, that she wanted to continue with the interview and was keen to provide more explanation about her emotional 'outburst'. Especially at this point, I remember providing more signs of engagement which included gestures such as nodding or asking the participant to clarify a point of term. By doing the hierarchy between me and researched was reduced.

Oakley's (1981) deliberation regarding interviewing women made me reflect on the literature where considering emotionality and ethics is explained. While I considered this as an important element of the research, the fieldnote here also acted as additional information that helped to contextualise the data. I noted:

> *'It is when I felt guilt for having an easy and enjoyable pregnancy. With relative ease, I left both my children in the care of my mum and the nursery staff while I went to work. I didn't cry, I didn't feel guilt and I didn't feel at the time that I was a 'bad' mother. Was I a 'bad' mother?'* [Fieldnote, 2016:3]

This reflexive aspect of the fieldnote was where feminism informed my research by recognising women's life stories as a valuable form of knowledge and by addressing the interconnection between categories, such as ethnicity and nationality. I was aware of the intensity when researching human experiences, and that one of the fundamental aspects was that the researcher needs to be responsive to the potential sensitivity of the interviewee and its possible impact on his/her own emotions and experiences, but when the situation occurred, the feelings of empathy towards my participant were evident. Both these notes helped me later, particularly in the chapter where I analysed and presented the data on the emotional labour of the nursery workers.

3.12 Methods of data analysis

The next section explains the methods of data analysis that are central to feminist thinking. In research informed by feminism, the relationship between researcher and researched needs attention in order to address the power relations between them. To understand people's experiences, I was drawing on Ramazanoğlu and Holland's (2002) suggestion of the reality that is constructed in the gendered social relations. This is due to the gendered structure of the ECEC workforce explained in Chapters 1 and 2. In order to address the aims of the research and to contextualise the narratives, my aim was to put the narratives in dialogue with each other and to understand the ways in which these dialogues operate between the personal and the surrounding social world

that '*produce, consume, silence and contest'* realities (Esin et al., 2014: 205). By doing so, the 'meaning making' process in narrative inquiry can give a new dimension of the life experiences of nursery workers.

Hesse-Biber (2014) further claimed that, by using narratives as a tool to investigate human experiences such as gender, social inequalities and migration, this opens up an interdisciplinary space for narrative analysis. In the field of sociology, Riessman (2000), for example, suggested analysing the contradictions within the narratives, where the narrative analysis is co-constructed in the context of the research aims. Andrews et al. (2013: 203) recommended extending this model of looking at the narratives as '*coherent, natural and unified entities'* which is referred to as the constructionist approach to narrative analysis. Esin et al. (2014) further explained that narrative constructionism operates at different and connected levels; first, in terms of co-construction between stories within one text including the tacit dimension of it, and second, with regard to the power relations that are part of the data analysis process. Esin et al. (2014: 205) claimed that the constructionist approach, by addressing stories as co-constructed or dialogically constructed,

> *'…stresses the constantly changing elements in the construction of narratives rather than reading them as finished products of particular circumstances that may change over time'.*

Therefore, data analysis is an ongoing process in narrative research through which researchers analyse the multiple layers of the 'told stories' (Squire et al., 2014), focusing on '*the participants' self-generating meaning*' (Esin et al., 2014: 204). Story telling in this research has been intended as a model for narrative analysis. Stories act as a tool for uncovering counter-stories and marginalized voices in a range of diverse ECEC contexts.

Another important part of this approach is the power relation to narrative analysis. In the construction of narratives, power is to be understood in a Foucauldian way (2001), where power is widely spread in different forms, but it is always relational. The emphasis is on the power relation between the researched and researcher, the data and its interpretation. The meanings of narratives are not only co-constructed by the researcher and by the researched, but also by the audience's meaning making at the location and the time of the reading (Esin et al., 2014; Square et al., 2014). Audiences

are future readers who will further be involved in meaning making of the reading within their own social world. Salmon (2008: 31) reminded that:

> *'The audience, whether physically present or not, exerts a crucial influence on what can and cannot be said, how things should be expressed, what can be taken for granted, what needs explaining, and so on. We now recognise that the personal account, in research interviews, which has traditionally been seen as the expression of a single subjectivity, is in fact a co-construction'.*

All these different features of the individual story analysis are part of the construction of subjectivities. Subjects come into existence during the interview process and it is this relationship between the stories and subjectivities that are of interest.

Since there is no simple rule for how to display the constructed narrative of a speaker/ listener, and as there is not a strict guideline about how to identify and analyse stories, I followed the suggestions of Gubrium and Holstein (2001), Riessman (2008) and Esin et al. (2014). They suggested combining the constructionist narrative approach with the thematic analysis approach. By using 'framework analysis', emerging themes can be traced. This approach has five stages, 1- familiarisation, 2- identifying themes, 3- coding, 4- charting and 5- mapping and interpretation.

3.12.1 Thematic analysis

In preparation for the data analysis (stage 1) I revisited the section where the two key policies were introduced (Chapter 2). This provided a basis for a critical analysis of the ways in which 'good' nursery work(er) was constructed in policy documents (Chapter 4). I applied Dean's (2010) four dimensions of policy analysis to help understand how policy impacts the nursery practice and how nursery workers interpret policies. Dean (2010: 43) suggested that certain questions need to be asked such as '*What forms of conduct are expected from them? What duties and rights do they have? How are these duties enforced and rights ensured?*' This links to the four dimensions of governmentality, namely the '*fields of visibility, the technical aspect of government, forms of knowledge, and formation of identities'* (Dean, 2010: 41). By searching answers to these questions, emerging themes were identified in the data.

Once I had re-visited the policy section, and when the data collection was completed, I returned to the raw data. At this final stage, I was confronted with an immense number of pages of transcribed interviews and fieldnotes. Despite immersing myself in the raw data immediately after the first few interviews (transcribing and writing the research diary), I

was concerned with how to select narratives for analytical purposes, and how to transform them into a meaningful and coherent text. This was still part of the first stage of the thematic analysis, that is, familiarisation with the data.

I positioned myself as an active participant in this process where themes did not just 'emerge' but the analysis was concerned with nuances/small stories, untold stories, contradictions and uncertainty (Riessman, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2015). To achieve a systematic analysis of the data, and to gain a more transparent picture, I combined manual and computer-assisted methods. The computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (QDAS), NVivo 11 (Yuen and Richards, 1994) acted as a tool in assisting in the organisation of the research data (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). This process involved revisiting and re-reading the narratives several times and, when I had uploaded all the interview data into NVivo software, the 'organised chaos' was made visual. Thus I could start with the initial coding of the data (referred to as the creation of nodes in NVivo) and the search for patterns in the data. This was the second stage, the identification of the thematic framework. Then I turned to the questions of how stories are produced in a specific time, in a specific historical context and who produced the stories.

While I was looking for common stories across the interviews, I also looked for the characteristics of each individual such as qualification level, experience, their role in the nursery, gender and parenthood as well as trying to find an answer to the question suggested by Dean (2010), such as what forms of conduct are expected from the nursery workers? This exercise helped me to understand the data and to identify themes, in particular those which had not occurred to me during the interviews. Identifying the 'themes' proved to be a continuous process involving modifications based on revisiting the data, my fieldnotes and the discussions with my supervisors.

The third stage entailed coding all the data, developing both primary and secondary codes or nodes. In exploring nursery workers' construction of the 'good' nursery worker, it emerged that it was often mediated by what other nursery workers' professional practice looked like. They also have their own story about their emotional involvement when working with children. Despite the diversity of the participants' roles and qualification levels, some common themes emerged which were grouped, as shown in Table 2. Working within this framework, the transcripts provided the basis for analysis and a profile of each participant across all themes. When data were indexed using codes, they were grouped into three main areas:

1) The relationship between the nursery worker and the ways in which the policy document(s) mandated them.
    a. How nursery workers interpret and respond to policy requirements.
    b. Qualification requirements.
    c. Professionalisation of the workforce.
2) The gendered composition of nursery workers.
    a. Nursery workers as mothers.
    b. Men in nurseries.
3) Emotional labour.
    a. Affection (love, passion, attitude, attachment).
    b. Impact of motherhood on care (changing and contradicting views, professional versus personal).
    c. Dealing with parents' emotion (settling in).

By thematically grouping the stories, I started to analyse the themes according to which stories were constructed by which participants. At this stage, I had revisited the QDAS again, and this helped me to identify when, and in which interview, I felt that the story told was very similar to my experience from when I was a nursery manager (Appendix 7). This approach allowed me to pay additional attention to the ways in which meaning making was generated as well as addressing contradictions within the same narratives, and to acknowledge different levels of complex relationships to power (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001). For transparency, in Table 2, references made in relation to certain themes is shown.

Table 2. Themes

Themes	Codes or nodes
The relationship between the nursery worker and the ways in which the policy document(s) mandates them	**Qualification and professionalisation**
	EYFS – meeting the requirements
	Common sense v knowledge
	Staff: children ratio and increased paperwork
Maternal discourses and the formation of 'good' nursery practice	**Nursery workers as :-mothers (older nursery workers, experience); non mothers; role of the mother**
	Sexual orientation such as gays (myth about men in ECEC) **LGBTQ**
	Glorification of males (different, better than females)
Emotional labour	**Affection (love, passion, attitude, attachment)**
	Impact of motherhood on care (changing and contradicting views, professional v personal)
	Dealing with parents' emotion (settling in)

These three broad areas were used to describe participants' views and perceptions in each theme and sub-theme and the findings were linked back to Chapter 2 – the literature review.

3.13 Issues of quality and rigour

As explained in section 3.5, this study rejects finding an 'absolute truth', and follows the argument that preconception may cause partiality. Esin et al. (2014) argued that this is the precondition of all enquiries. Feminist followers claim that no one is neutral (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002), as knowledge and understanding are based upon the subjective experiences and biases of individuals, and that all experiences are equally valid (Weedon, 1997). The data in this study reflect this. Furthermore the sample group was relatively small; however, data were rich and included interesting personal information. The interview was tailored to the job role and individual. Nevertheless, the study had some practical and personal limitations. Practically, I would have liked to interview more

male nursery workers who were not in managerial position. This proved to be difficult, firstly, due to the number of male workers in the ECEC field and secondly, not being granted access to interview a male worker.

In addition, the use of NVivo 11 software improved the transparency of the analysis process, and assisted the organisation of the data, although it is important to recognise that the value of using both manual and electronic tools in qualitative data analysis and management, rather than prioritising one method over another, allows the advantages of each method to be exploited.

3.14 Summary

A qualitative approach to research was appropriate for the study, as the research aimed to gain an insight into the experiences of the twenty two nursery workers, and their understanding of the construction of 'good' nursery work, and what makes a 'good' nursery worker. In this chapter, the justification of the research design was presented followed by the ontological and epistemological approach underpinning the study. Detail was given about the recruitment and sampling of participants, including ethical considerations and explanation and justification of the method of data collection.

The final section in this chapter described the process for the data analysis. By employing thematic analysis, the possibility of interpretation and negotiation was made available. This was achieved by considering the positioning of the researcher and researched, the political context in which the data generation took place and the local/micro power relations in which the respondents operated.

In the next three chapters, findings are presented along with a discussion regarding the extent to which the research aims of this study have been addressed. In Chapter 4, the nursery workers' stories about how they interpret policies, and the ways in which they discuss the importance of qualification level are elucidated.

Chapter 4: The relationship between the nursery worker and policy

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of the three findings and discussion chapters. It starts with the analysis of the relationship between the nursery worker and how policy documents were mandating them. The chapter furthermore explores how nursery workers understand and follow the policy when discussing the construction of 'good' nursery work, by nursery workers reflecting on their practice.

4.2 Construction of 'good' nursery worker in policy documents

Government rhetoric on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is framed by how to raise the standards of the service nursery workers provide. They advocate that skilled and 'good' nursery work can be achieved by a qualified workforce (DfE, 2014a; 2017b). To address the research aims, therefore, it is crucial to understand how good nursery work was constructed in the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014a), which is the statutory guidance for nursery workers in England.

The pedagogical debate between formal education and play based learning has been a much debated topic in England (see 1.3). The anxiety about 'schoolification' of young children among nursery workers has been raised by many such as Trevarthen (2011) and Moss (2017, 2019). The 'school readiness' agenda was evident in the thirty two pages' long document, EYFS (DfE, 2014a), in which the word 'must' appears 232 times in the 'school readiness' context. The word 'must' indicates very firm recommendations and implies compulsion such as:

> *'Children **must** be given access to a wide range of reading materials (books, poems, and other written materials) to ignite their interest'. (p. 8)*
>
> *'When assessing communication, language and literacy skills, practitioners **must** assess children's skills in English'. (p. 9*)
>
> *'Providers **must** also support children in four specific areas, through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied. The specific areas are: literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, expressive arts and design'.* (*p. 8*)
>
> *'Practitioners **must** consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and **must** use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development'. (p.8)*

In such a policy context there is a danger of seeing nursery workers' good practice, children's development and emotional well-being through measured outcomes. The evidence based nursery practice is measured against externally prescribed standards and benchmarks to ensure that ECEC services are worth the investment. 'Measuring' children's outcomes disregards the uniqueness of the individual child and may neglect the cultural, language and other heritage valued by their parents. Good nursery workers, therefore, are constructed in this policy document, in such a way that it fulfils government goals. It shows the belief that certain and particular skills and knowledge are necessary to address and assess the 'needs of the child'. This entails individualised planning involving parents/carers.

Foucault's (1988) theorisation suggests that these kinds of activities of nursery workers lead to the construction of nursery workers' own subjectivity through a constant reflection about themselves as someone who adheres to the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) guidance. This reflection requires of nursery workers the monitoring, testing, improving and transforming of their own professional practice. In this sense, the EYFS framework 'tells' the nursery workers how to conduct themselves to be 'good' in order to achieve the best outcomes for the children in their care. This can refer to the achievement of (or striving to achieve) a certain mode of being that contains the characteristics of an individual's notion of the ethical subject and the ways in which the nursery worker cannot chose the way they behave but are 'mandated' by the imperatives of the policy document (Foucault, 2003). Foucault further argued that it is through these active professional practices that the self is not invented by the individual but by society, culture and social group. Therefore, the ways in which nursery workers contest and respond to the EYFS is based on the legal requirements to be followed, as well as on the expectations of children, parents and nursery workers.

Additionally, Dean's (2010: 42) concept of '*the technical (or techne) aspect of government*' forms a certain knowledge. 'Techne' in this sense refers to the EYFS, which leads to insisting a certain type of identity of nursery workers, one that 'passively' follows the statutory guidance. This kind of approach draws attention away from the value and importance of reflection as a critical thinking tool when evaluating and shaping nursery practice. In this sense, the focus is on the production of evidence from workplace activities, nurseries, to demonstrate skill. This is the 'technical competence' discourse of nursery workers; this is what Moss (2006: 32) called 'nursery workers as technicians'.

No matter how high the level of these skills is evidenced, this leaves nursery workers in danger of being perceived as technicians, merely fulfilling pre-set approved practices, rather than being creative and critical experts (Moss 2006; 2019). What it means is the increased government intervention regarding the performance of nursery workers, through the EYFS. The framework requires nursery workers to behave in a particular way in order to be thought of as 'good'. This is how people govern themselves through governmentality and neoliberalism in order to control their own actions for the benefit of the state, the nursery, the parents and the children. Governmentality, therefore, implies the relationship of the self to the self, and this concept covers the range of pre-set practices that constitute and define the strategies conceptualising 'good' nursery work.

4.3 How nursery workers interpret and respond to policy requirements

Participants in this study were asked to describe and explain who they would consider to be a 'good' nursery worker. Frequent reflections were made in reference to relevant qualifications as well as to the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014a) framework, suggesting that by following the statutory guidance their practice is necessarily 'good'. This section, therefore, reports on how participants interpret 'good' practice through qualification which helps (or hinders) the nursery workers to shape their practice and how participants interpret the policy to construct the 'good' nursery work(er).

4.3.1 Does relevant qualification help professional practice?

The wider assumption is that relevant higher education qualifications produce a 'good' professional nursery worker (Miller, 2008). Chapter 2 discusses the fact that, in the UK context, a higher education degree is not necessary to work with children (DfE, 2014a), and it highlights the requirements and issues around obtaining a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 3. These requirements are specified in the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (DfE, 2014a) in which the criteria set out the minimum needs for what a level 3 nursery worker should know, understand, and be able to do in order to be considered as a qualified person who supports young children from birth to five years old in the nursery. However, since the government's policy document 'More Great Childcare' (DfE, 2013) was released, the proposed changes regarding the qualification have caused challenges for the ECEC workforce. One of the biggest areas of debate is over adult to child ratios for childcare. The significance of the change is that staff

with a relevant qualification are included in the higher staff: children ratio. The proposed change has seen an increase in the number of children supervised by one adult who holds a relevant qualification (see Chapter 2). The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2014a) statutory framework states that:

> '*The manager must hold at least a full and relevant level 3 qualification and at least half of all other staff must hold at least a full and relevant level 2 qualification'*. (DfE, 2014a: 21)

The interpretation of this guidance reflects the numerous comments made about the nursery workers' qualification level. In this study, Bea, who was an experienced nursery manager and a level 3 qualification assessor, discussed the ways in which she carried out her learners' assessment. Bea considered that the assessment was based both on the government guidance and on her own subjective evaluations of the assessment. The following extract from the interview explains her views:

> *'It's difficult to assess the learner, yes, you need to spend quite a lot of time with the learner to really see if that professional quality is there, so I think it cannot be immediately decided who is good and who is not. You need to see the interactions of that person with the children and to decide if that person qualifies as a good practitioner or not. Caring for children is not just babysitting, you know. I can do as much as I can to deliver and explain what good practice is. But, if they are only ticking the boxes, if they are meeting the criteria of knowledge and if they don't make major mistakes throughout my observations, you would give them the qualification even if they don't qualify in your eyes as 'good'. They then become professionals working with children, but they are not necessary the good professionals. I called them 'fake' professionals.*
>
> ***Eva**: So which kind of qualities would you prioritise when observing or hiring?*
>
> *Definitely not those which only tick the boxes. In my previous role I have hired people and yes, perhaps this is not the proper way to do it I know, but I would ask people to work for me whom I had previously worked with. Those are the people that have a genuine interest in children. People who are patient, focused and a little bit workaholic…'* [Bea, nursery manager and assessor]

During the interview, Bea had positioned herself as an assessor and as a nursery manager; however, her narrative was interwoven between her personal and professional principles. The significance in which Bea had constructed the 'good' nursery worker was seeing ECEC as more than 'just babysitting' and that the nursery worker should not just be someone who was 'ticking the boxes' and not 'making mistakes'. From her perspective, nursery workers should be engaging in the process of 'good' professionalism that could

situate the nursery workers as part of the process, rather than being compliant to an externally constructed identity of 'babysitter'.

This view is stressed in Dalli and Urban's work (2010: 183), in which it is discussed that those nursery workers working in the sector have clear ideas about how to behave and work professionally. Hence Bea stated that, during assessment, spending time with her learner is vital in order to determine who is a 'good' practitioner as it allows her to observe other qualities than only 'ticking the boxes'. Those other qualities refer to emotional qualities such as 'patience'. However, by stating that, in order to be 'good', a nursery worker is someone who needs to be 'a little bit workaholic' supports the neo-liberal competence approach (Moss, 2019) where the nursery worker works beyond the paid hours. At the same time, discourses from the political arena are challenging Bea's idea of 'good' practice (patience, focused, workaholic). Moss (2010: 10) suggested that the discourses of 'quality', 'best practice' and 'evidence based practice' are creating a system that implies there is only one right way of working with children, and that the nursery worker has been reinterpreted as a 'technician'. It could be argued that the ways in which Bea assesses her students is with a focus on meeting a set of assessable standards, which fits the 'techincist' category argued by Moss.

Bea, however, is trying to resist this view by saying that '*I can do as much as I can to deliver and explain what good practice is*', and that is her own subjective and culturally informed view in which a 'good' nursery worker has to perform both by meeting the assessment criteria and to be patient and focused. Her construction of good practice reflects Urban et al's (2010: 515) suggestions. In these authors' view, 'good' practice should rest upon a combination of positive and personal attributes, 'competences' and externally defined commitments.

At this point another aspect of assessment needs to be considered. As an assessor, Bea's salary was based on the succession rate of her learners, meaning that her salary depends on the number of learners passing the assessment. To 'pass' a learner, the minimum requirements for the '*high quality Early Years Education need to be met'*, according to the guidance issued by The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) (2013: 2). This shows that the application of the national policy produced a more structured and regulatory approach to the way in which assessment of the trainee nursery workers was carried out. Bea's account showed that even if in her eyes the nursery worker is not 'good', if they meet the set criteria they will gain their qualification as nursery workers.

For Bea, the assessment should rest upon a combination of positive and personal attributes of the trainee, in addition to the externally defined commitments (such as the guidance from the NCTL). As a result, a 'good' nursery worker, as constructed by Bea, has a very diverse skill. Bea also spoke about a '*fake professional*' who lacks passion, enthusiasm, and devotion towards the nursery work but also holds a qualification.

Several participants described a nursery worker as a 'good professional' even though they did not have a relevant qualification. For example, Alexander spoke highly about one of the nursery workers who he had employed. He explained his justification for offering a job to one of his employees, despite not having relevant qualifications:

> *'She's the most amazing practitioner. Like, you know, a very creative person so it's really sad that she was 'stopped' to have a qualification she really wanted. I know it's probably the story a thousand times over across the country, but, you know, these people who are making a decision in their office are not necessarily seeing … how absurd it seems, how ludicrous and illogical it is sometimes. Because when you see somebody so fantastic with children who's actually being held back from developing their career because of not being able to process mental arithmetic questions fast enough…really very sad and silly'.* [Alexander, co-owner and manager]

Similarly Ruth explained how much she wanted to have a qualification, but due to her diagnosis of being dyslexic, her dream was never fulfilled. She said:

> *'I didn't pass the exam. I went and tried again but I didn't achieve it because of my dyslexia. I just don't do very well in exams and this exam was three hours long. I was so scared of doing it again, I don't want to fail, I don't like failing. I was a bit sad but I'm fine now'.* [Ruth, nursery worker]

In both individual cases, there was a sense of further professional development through gaining a qualification. Miller (2008) and Nutbrown (2012) suggested that qualification increases quality and outcomes for children. What was not highlighted in their work however, as the above examples illustrate, is that for some nursery workers it is not possible to achieve their potential and their aspirations due to individual learning difficulties. For these two nursery workers the ways in which the ECEC qualification was designed meant that career opportunities through this channel were not possible. Despite this, they remained working in the nursery, and as Alexander described, '*she is the most amazing practitioner*'.

Instead of providing alternative methods for gaining the qualification, the two mentioned cases can be conceptualised in relation through which individuals seek to transform the self. Ruth, for example, by convincing herself that '*I am fine now',* indicates self-work to cope with the failure and with possible future failure. This self-control is one feature of governmentality where the 'autonomous individual's' capacity for self-control – like Ruth's – is linked to the forms of political/educational rule such as the ways in which examination takes place. In this sense, the individuals 'thought' processes, and how they operate within the organised ways of doing, '*shape and reshape the 'truth' in social, cultural and political practices*' (Foucault, 2001: 27). This means that in both cases the individuals governed themselves according to what they see to be 'true'. In this case their 'truth' is that, due to their learning difficulties, the desired qualification cannot be achieved, thus causing disappointment; however, it did not stop them working in the nursery. Their examples also indicated that qualification was not necessary to do their role well.

Furthermore, in both cases the nursery workers were showing how fragile and powerless they were against the forces that required them to sit the exam, resulting in a stagnation in their progression towards qualification and an unwillingness to retake the examination. Therefore, the Nutbrown Review (2012), which called for at least a level 3 qualified nursery worker, needs further attention to consider how effective and appropriate the qualification for individuals with learning difficulties is, as well as providing alternative routes to recognise the 'good' work individuals do without qualification.

4.3.2 Participants' motives for having a qualification: self-satisfaction and increased quality services

Another example of the interpretation of policy is found in Alexander's account, in which he described the 'good' nursery worker as follows:

> '*I think ideally professionalism would be more similar to 'good' but it's very hard to define because professionalism is meant to be agreed on by everybody, whereas 'good' can't ever be agreed on by everybody, because we are all individuals with our own subjective perceptions of what 'good' practice is'.*
>
> [Alexander, co-owner and manager]

In this quote, Alexander makes some distinctive differences between professionalism as defined by the government, and being a 'good' professional. He recognises his subjective approach to 'good' but also denies the existence of the idealistic approach to professional nursery work. Statutory requirements and guidance are central to Alexander's

understanding of professionalism where '*professionalism is meant to be agreed on by everybody'*.

Both Osgood (2010) and Chalke (2013) highlighted their concern about the 'narrow definition of professionalism' where the role of the nursery worker signifies the government's construction of professionalism. They were calling for a deeper understanding of nursery practice which would enable the nursery workers to put forward their creativity and ideas for improvement on how to deliver the framework. In both Bea's and Alexander's narratives, one of the key aspects of 'good' professional practice is that it is individually constructed which could allow creativity to flourish.

As stated above, the statutory guidance is that the nursery manager should hold at least a level 3 qualification (DfE, 2014a). Sharon expressed her feelings that having a degree as an addition to the level 3 qualification which she already holds, would increase her knowledge to run the nursery successfully. Sharon also hoped that a degree would make her feel more respected, giving her *validation* of her knowledge.

> *'Only as NVQ level 3 qualified, and as a manager, I don't feel like I know enough, which is why, obviously, I want to do the foundation degree, and then, after this, to try to gain the Early Years Teacher status which will show and validate my knowledge and experience really, to be valued more'.* [Sharon, owner, nursery manager]

Sharon, in her account, refers to her need to increase her knowledge. By doing so, she believes this would have a positive impact on children's outcome. This is what Melhuish and Gardiner's (2018) research showed, that with an aspiration to hold a higher professional qualification, a positive impact on the nursery staff and services can be produced. This is relevant to Tan's (2014) view, that qualification increases human capital through knowledge and skills. This is part of the ECEC's professionalisation process which reverberates with what Urban (2010) argued, that any profession has always been linked to knowledge. Sharon's self-reflection indicates that the reason for studying is to execute her role better and to be *valued* more.

Sue completed a higher education degree. Her reason was that through reflecting on her practice she felt the degree would give her confidence in knowing what to say to parents and what to do in difficult situations. She said:

> ‘*It was in acknowledging that I lacked the breadth and depth of professional knowledge to resolve issues that made me think of applying for the degree course’.* [Sue, deputy manager]

While both Sharon’s and Sue’s desire to have a degree was for more than personal satisfaction, it is linked to the wider ECEC community where they are interested in improving the nursery outcomes rather than it just being their individual goal to have a degree.

> *‘I first started working in the nursery about 20 years ago and I only recently had the desire of furthering my training. I felt like that I have something more to prove- not only my own satisfaction to have a degree- as childcare has been looked upon as an easy job that anyone could do’.* [Sue, deputy manager]

As stated before, Foucault’s ‘*Technologies of the self’* is based on personalised models; however, in Sue’s account it was a necessary precursor for the wider ECEC community as well as her own, individualistic reason. Sue felt that people working in ECEC need more recognition. Furthermore, Sue’s account also illustrates what Dalli and Urban (2010) and Urban (2010) have said, that specific knowledge leads to *professionalisation* which in turn leads to *good quality* nursery work.

Some participants, however, expressed their frustration after achieving a higher qualification, as they realised that there is little or no prospect of promotion. For example, Sandra said that both of her managers *‘are only NVQ level 3 qualified*’ and noted that she is more qualified than any other employee at the nursery in which she is working. Sandra was holding a foundation degree and was studying towards her honours degree. She also said that her motive to study was based on her individualistic reason:

> *‘I felt I wanted a new challenge. I had a broad range of experience in early years practice but completing the Foundation Degree has provided me with real breadth and depth of knowledge and [has] built confidence’.* [Sandra, nursery worker]

Similarly, another participant, Trudie, said that her confidence increased after having a higher education qualification, stating:

> *‘I didn't realise how much my practice improved during and after the degree, just how I deal with day-to-day things. I think it's my confidence that has grown more than anything, and I think this is why probably we improved the last Ofsted inspection that we had just over a year ago. Whereas the previous one was satisfactory, this time it was good in all areas’.* [Trudie, owner, nursery manager]

Both Sandra and Trudie experienced a growth in confidence and competence as they progressed through the higher education course. This reflects a wide range of research that

suggests higher qualification improves competence (Aukrust and Rydland, 2009; Peeters and Vanderboeck, 2011) and, with increasing competence, good quality service improves. This was rewarded with an improved Ofsted inspection result.

Following the independent review by Nutbrown (2012), there have been long-term commitments to raising the calibre, expertise and prestige of the workforce in ECEC. Ofsted (2015) reported that 'standards continue to rise across the country', which is in line with Nutbrown recommendation. Ofsted (2015: 10) further stated:

> '*This meant that the education and training of professionals in early years' sectors must be consistently good and focused on the right things'.*

Furthermore, the elements of self-discovery in Sandra's and Trudie's account (e.g. how much their practice improved or how the degree provided them with *real* knowledge) corresponds to the technology of the self in which the technologies of self operates through a relationship with their own self-regulating abilities, and through a logic of choice (Rose, 1999). This transformation of the self, such as building on their confidence and knowledge, resonates with Rose's (1999: 88) explanation of technologies of self and that is 'i*nculcating desires for self-development'.*

This is how these participants constitute themselves and their development, but also it illuminates the feelings of 'frustration' of not being more valued or being offered a promotion. An example showing 'frustration' was Claire's account, in which she explained that she wanted to take an opportunity to study towards a higher education degree to be better at what she was doing. Her experience after achieving an Early Years Teacher status, however, has not been rewarding. She said:

> *'Sadly, I am an Early Years Teacher but I don't feel like I was respected more than before. Perhaps at times when [colleagues] ask me for advice, but generally, I feel stuck in my 'world''*. [Claire, nursery worker]

Clare's striving for a personal achievement by having a degree has been very similar to Sandra's and Trudie's aspirations; however, for Claire, it feels like she is 'stuck in [her] world'. To understand why Claire feels like this, it is possible to turn to Foucault's (1993) idea that the two types of technologies – technologies of power and technologies of the self – hardly ever function separately; there is constant interaction between them. So the relationship between the two technologies is a way of describing the existing relationship between nursery work and ECEC practices on the one hand, and the behaviour of individuals, on the other. This is exemplified through Claire's accounts (which also

corresponds with Ruth's account above) in which she went through a change where the self was transformed.

In Claire's case, these two technologies interact with each other signifying the point made by Foucault (1993: 203), that she has to take into account the points '*where the technique of the self are integrated into structures of coercion or domination*'. Domination in this case is the widely accepted discourse that nursery work has been perceived as a low-skilled industry where pay and working conditions are challenging (Moss, 2010; Chalke, 2013). Claire's account shows the lack of professional promotion and pay award and that nursery work is still depicted as undervalued. Gaining a degree has not brought the hoped for 'self -actualisation' (Rose, 1999) but dissatisfaction and a certain type of unhappiness, despite being the most qualified member of staff in the nursery.

The 'good' nursery worker here is constructed in two ways - through degree level qualification and, for some of the participants, by increased knowledge and confidence, while for other participants, it signifies dissatisfaction and unhappiness. While there is evidence that staff qualification increases quality (Ofsted, 2015), it must be acknowledged that frustration and unhappiness can influence the nursery work practice, and the outcomes for children.

4.3.3 Common sense or qualification?

There is a similarity between nursery day-to-day practice and normal household routine (Steinnes, 2014); therefore what is considered 'common sense knowledge' and 'professional knowledge' is not easily distinguishable. Gemma expressed her concerns as to how, once the topic of qualification was mentioned, the shift in some people's view was noticeable:

> *'I don't think people see us as professional. I think people think of us as someone who does babysitting.*
>
> ***Eva**: Can you tell me more about this?*
>
> *Smart business people, dressed smartly, I think they are the real professionals, yeah. When I go out with children, little children, people think they're my children because I have two children myself. So then, people don't view me as a professional. They say they think I'm a mum as soon as they see me out. They don't think, 'oh, there's that nursery on a trip' or 'I am working, doing my job'. Because of these reasons, no, I don't see myself as a professional really. But you know, as soon as I tell the people that I've done my qualifications, that I have a degree, people view me more as professional. People who know I have done my*

> *qualification, like family members, they will 'phone me up to seek advice about their children and things like that'.* [Gemma, room leader]

Gemma's example illustrates that the pedagogical content of the nursery workers role is not easily identified. Gemma's account also portrays that the nursery worker role has been seen as 'babysitting' which, it could be argued, anyone is capable of doing. This construction diminishes the nature of the nursery work and the low status that is assigned to it, as there are no special requirements to be a babysitter. Gemma, however, followed the EYFS (DfE, 2014a: 28) guidance which states that *'providers must provide access to an outdoor play area or, if that is not possible, ensure that outdoor activities are planned and taken on a daily basis'*. This correlates with Urban's (2010) suggestion that nursery workers have to meet the expectations imposed on them. In Gemma's case, whilst following the guidance, she felt that she is not seen as professional by the public. Urban argued that this is due to government strategy that contributes to a particular view of professional practice in which the nursery workers are the main actors. For example, working in the nursery with a degree (such as Gemma or Claire) should have broken the clear distinction between professional and nonprofessional/babysitter role. The three-year degree that Gemma obtained should have afforded her a professional status through the specialised knowledge and expertise that she has gained. The qualification should have acted in a way in which Gemma was able to assign status that was worth more than 'babysitting'. The knowledge that comes with qualification symbolises the work in ECEC as important (Urban, 2010), together with the professional language with which the knowledge is expressed. Yet, Gemma's account shows that not only the public perception, but her own view of herself is connected to the 'common sense' debate (Stainnes, 2014) about been seen as a professional.

This brings the discussion back to the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) policy. At the beginning of this chapter it was noted that, according to the EYFS statutory guidance, no qualification is required to work with children. This can lead to a wider understanding that working with children is seen as something that anyone can do which over-simplifies a nursery worker's responsibilities.

It also emerged that Ana believed that the qualification was not necessary to work with children. She said:

> '*Just to care for them [children] you don't need to do an NVQ, do you? To go and change a nappy, you don't need to do an NVQ, do you? You don't need to do an NVQ to give them a snack, do you?'* [Ana, nursery worker]

Denise, a nursery manager, expressed an opposing view by saying:

> '*It worries me that the people come in to do the role and then they seem to put on it their own personal beliefs, without listening to the professionals of the industry'*. [Denise, deputy nursery manager]

These two contradictory accounts illustrate that the field is still divided between the common sense and professional knowledge based approach. The idea of the professionalisation of the ECEC workforce was to raise the quality of the ECEC (Miller et al., 2008; Campbell-Barr, 2015; Urban, 2018). This kind of assessment suggests ideas about the origins of professionalism that value knowledge over skills, with a requirement for engaging in extensive learning before significant practice is undertaken and possibly the privileging of the mind over physical work. Gemma's example illustrates that the possession of a qualification influences and shapes the individual and the perception of the society. A Foucauldian approach to power circulation that controls every point of social and professional life can be traced here. Foucault (1993) claimed that these control mechanisms frame, discipline and regulate the individuals.

Similarly, Trudie, despite previously saying that the degree had helped her in increasing her confidence and professional knowledge, expressed the view that having a degree or a level 3 qualification was not always necessary.

> *'The deputy manager has only a certificate in play group practice. It is not even an L3 qualification, it is a certificate. She got it within two months. But she is absolutely my right arm. I just look across the room, I don't need to use any words, she just knows what I am thinking, she knows what I want to do, we just click. So has no real qualification but she has skills, experience, knowledge'*. [Trudie, owner, manager]

Both Ana's and Trudie's accounts indicate that nursery workers with no, or limited, educational qualification spend a considerable amount of time with children. This could give grounds for understanding that a significant amount of nursery work is based on 'common sense'. Their accounts also indicate that the EYFS guidance on the staff qualification needed to work with children had been followed; however, the challenge for the ECEC workface remains and that is their official recognition. One of the reasons is that the nursery worker role includes practices which have traditionally been performed by people without qualification, such as changing nappies or serving food to children.

Knowledge that is based only on experiences, Vincent and Braun (2011) argued, lacks theoretical underpinning that potentially their work can be degraded into nursery workers' *opinion* or *prejudice*. It can be argued that, without specific and professional knowledge, nursery workers may lack the understanding of how a child's development can be promoted, for example, the importance of the key working approach, which is intense, hard work and involves commitment towards the child and the parents (Elfer et al. 2005).

In relation to the question 'does the nursery worker need a qualification to learn these skills' Trudie stated:

> '*I think experience is important, but by having a qualification, it really helps you, but experience is more important than qualification'*. [Trudie, owner, manager]

Although Trudie does not specify which kind of experience she is referring to (experience working with children or experience of motherhood), her account indicates that skills can be learnt through experiences. Knowledge based practice, which is the theoretical underpinning of nursery work, loses its importance. The 'feminine' characteristics such as 'caring' for children are seen as 'common sense'. This is line with Hutchinson et al's (2019) report, which indicates that when choosing the care for their children, service users (mainly mothers) would primarily look for 'gentle' characteristics in the nursery workers. Therefore, there can be debate about what kind of knowledge and skills are needed to appear good in front of the parents. At the same time, knowledge about the EYFS (DfE, 2014a), how to observe, assess, plan and communicate with the children, requires a different type or set of skills.

It can be argued that it is important to have relevant formal education as a foundation for professional development where the expert knowledge enables the nursery workers to move beyond the 'experience only' based approach. Knowing, for example, the importance of the key workers approach, or the attachment theory of how infants learn will enable the nursery workers to further support the learning process.

4.4 The increased paperwork and staff: child ratio

Another key factor found prominently in the data was a sense that workload had, over a period of time, intensified. This was primarily attributed to a cultural shift in nursery provision that demanded greater evidence of effectiveness (for example increased record-keeping and monitoring, planning and preparation for Ofsted inspections). This process has been extensively debated within the field of education (Reay and Ball, 1998; Ball

2003), with commentators concluding that such reforms lead to reduced autonomy of the educators, meaning that they become preoccupied with adherence to standards and regulatory processes, the formal part of their work. For the nursery workers, meeting the formal part of their role has caused an issue as to how to meet the staff: child ratio. The EYFS (DfE, 2014a; 2017b: 21) clearly sets out the staff: child ratio that needs to be followed, stating that '*staffing arrangements must meet the needs of all children and ensure their safety*'.

However, rigid adherence to ratios has proved to be challenging as the nursery has to ensure that they have the correct number of qualified staff to care for children, to cover sickness, annual leave or staff's professional development. Further difficulties arise when nursery workers need to attend to tasks which leave the other member of staff alone such as food preparation, nappy changing or completing the increased record-keeping and strategic planning preparation for inspections. This can result in a failure to maintain the appropriate staff: child ratio. As a consequence, providers are caught between providing the best care for the children in the circumstances, and meeting the criteria of the EYFS and Ofsted. Sandra's and Melissa's accounts illuminate this.

> '*It is really important to meet the ratio but sometimes when people 'phone in sick or are on holidays it is really hard. It was a case when three staff 'phoned in sick and I panicked. I mean it, I really panicked'.* [Melissa, nursery worker]
>
> *'I constantly have to update my policies to ensure that the nursery is running smoothly and that we are meeting the ratio. We have to be ready for Ofsted to show that we do everything that is required'.* [Sandra, nursery worker]

Both Melissa's and Sandra's story can be linked to Foucault's concept of 'conduct of conduct' – how the actors within the nursery are subject to the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) framework. Conduct in their stories refers to their behaviour and actions by which they follow the set of standards and by which their behaviour can be judged. When this action is interrupted, however, by unforeseen events, such as staff shortage, the staff: child ratio cannot be met and staff can panic.

Furthermore, by stating that '*it is really important to meet the ratio'* or '*we have to ready for Ofsted',* both Sandra and Melissa reiterate the government goals that assign importance to the nursery workers. In this working environment, nursery workers are positioned as people who will provide the quality service by being 'Ofsted ready' and by meeting the staff: child ratio. Munton et al.'s (2002) review concluded that higher ratios (more staff per group of children) result in better outcomes for staff and children. This finding

sits well within the quality discourse of the government agenda of 'high quality child care' (DfE, 2017b).

However, the regulatory function of the policy organizes the nursery workers' everyday experiences and their actions, leading to Melissa feeling '*real panic'*. This is when the emotional implications of the nursery workers become a reality. Similarly, Sandra said that in order to be ready for Ofsted, set rules need to be followed (completed paperwork, meeting the staff: child ratio, for example). Urban et al. (2012) stated that this argument goes back to policy making in which the individual nursery worker has been hardly reached for their view, despite being the main actor who works towards realising the statutory EYFS (DfE, 2014a) framework.

As Foucault (1988) suggested, the individual, in this case the nursery worker, is transformed into the subject where the transformations take place outside of their work. He continued by saying that this is a different form of power relations in which:

> *'Individual practices [of self] are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group'.* (Foucault 1988: 122)

While Foucault sees technologies of self as an effect on the individual where they have '*transformed themselves in order to attain a certain type of happiness, purity wisdom, perfection, or immortality'* (Foucault, 1988: 18), the ways in which some nursery workers act and react in relation to an event (not meeting the ratio, for example) transforms the individual. This transformation is through increasing paperwork or documentation of professional practice in order to meet the frameworks of standards (Stronach et al. 2003). The rationale is that inspecting and measuring quality inevitably leads to better outcomes (improved professional standards and quality provision and hence 'school readiness' for children). Such cultures of accountability are expressions of 'governmentality' (Foucault 1988), which prompt the use of assessment data within a culture of accountability which allows the centralised control over local practice through largely self-monitoring responses. It is also evident in Linda's account.

> *'We were always filling in forms, all the time. You know, what the child has eaten, when they pooed, when we changed the nappy, did we put cream on it, did we not put cream on and so on. That tells you a certain amount, but it doesn't tell you, you know, when that child cried today, when that child smiled today, that I picked up the child, comforted him for two minutes and he was fine. That cannot be measured. My*

attachment and care is an immeasurable quality that you cannot measure. I think government needs to recognise and evaluate who is 'good' based on how they are with children'. [Linda, room leader]

Linda realised that the centrality of nursery work was located in responding to a child's need but this did not always materialise due to the nature of record keeping.

Furthermore, apprehensions about meeting the ratio were evident when staff were sent to attend the training provided by the local authority. Rosa, who was a volunteer, said that for her it is important to have access to free training as she is very keen to learn. She said:

'*There is so much paperwork to complete and so many other things to do that I need to understand'*. [Rosa, room leader]

Val also stipulated the importance of knowing how to comply with new regulations and how to complete the increased paperwork.

'I'm trying to understand what needs to be done, and I'm trying to get out of the room to do the paperwork but sometimes it is a nightmare. I have to cover sickness and staff shortage and have to monitor the room to meet the ratio'.

[Val, deputy manager]

From the manager's perspective, Sharon has explained that the role of the nursery worker had significantly changed in terms of what is expected from them since she had started working in a nursery 20 years ago. It was her role to ensure her staff were updated with the new policy requirements but she found it difficult to send everyone on the training due to meeting the staff: child ratio.

'Well, there are rules and legislation we need to know about and we need to follow. It wasn't expected from the practitioners to do this kind of paperwork before, the role has changed and I must confess, if I haven't had a training, I wouldn't understand the paperwork and wouldn't know the new requirements for level 3 qualifications.

***Eva**: How do you keep updated?*

Well the local authority provides a training and I try to send everyone to that training but it is hard due to the ratio. I can afford one course per term per staff. And I cascade it back to others through staff meetings'. [Sharon, owner, manager]

Since the qualification requirements for working with children are low, it is understandable that there is a need for nursery workers to attend relevant professional development courses in order to know how to deal with the increased paperwork. The EYFS guidance suggests that:

> '*Providers must support staff to undertake appropriate training and professional development opportunities to ensure they offer quality learning and development experiences for children that continually improves'*. (DfE, 2014a: 20)

Sharon's account indicates that she has tried hard to comply with the EYFS guidance. Sharon is also accountable for creating *'high quality settings which are welcoming, safe and stimulating, and where children are able to enjoy learning and grow in confidence* (DfE, 2014a: 16). Furthermore, the document encompasses official standards for learning, development, and care for babies and young children that must be met:

> *'The EYFS promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life'*. (DfE, 2014a: 2)

While the original idea of the implementation of the EYFS was to support the nursery workers, there was very limited guidance on how to do this and which skills they require to address seemingly 'needy' children. The construction of 'good' in the policy document, therefore, is someone who promotes teaching and learning and continuously ensures the inspiring and happy environment in which children thrive. This notion requires an understanding of how nursery workers have been governed as well as the need to recognise that there is a considerable amount of continuous personal development nursery workers face. As Dean's (2010) framework suggested, the technical aspect of government and the forms of knowledge that are required to be a 'good' nursery worker are heavily guided by the policy. This process is designed in such a way that governments and their agencies can lay claim to measures of 'quality' to present to the 'service providers' and so guide 'the service users'. The interrelationship between these concepts is unproblematised in the literature, as it can appear completely reasonable and hence impossible to challenge.

4.5 Participants' reflection on qualification

The government investment in ECEC, in terms of time, policy development, assessment and regulation, was broadly interpreted as overdue but welcomed by the ECEC workforce. Despite the concerns raised throughout this chapter in relation to government regulation, some participants spoke about the construction of the 'good' nursery worker as a complex process.

> *'[The qualification] gave a skill and it made me the person I am today, in as much as it taught me how to work with people, and how to communicate, and how to present myself and how to be a professional'*. [Gill, co-owner, manager]

Similarly, Trudie commented:

> *'I wanted to be seen that I know what I am talking about and I do know what I am talking about. But perhaps before my training I would have written a report in a more descriptive way, like mums write to us, 'he likes to do this', or 'she likes to do that', but I just wanted to use the EY jargon to show that I do know. It is having that confidence to know that what I have written is written professionally so it sounds like a real professional. As we are not invited to the meeting with other professionals, at least I wanted to show by writing that I know what I'm doing. So, I wanted the report to read more professionally. Having said that I am not worried about qualification, although the job is a big responsibility and needs to be seen as a professional role and they are professional even without the qualification, but it just wouldn't happen'.* [Trudie, owner, manager]

Both Gill and Trudie located themselves within the discourse of professionalism within the technical attributes, skills (Bolton, 2004), expertise (Dalli and Urban, 2010) and status that constitute a professional (Miller, 2008). However, Trudie's disappointment was apparent in her quote by stating '*as we are not invited to the meeting with other professionals, at least I wanted to show by writing that I know what I'm doing'*. The implication is that other professionals, even those with qualifications, saw nursery work as less worthy and therefore the nursery workers were not invited to attend specialised meetings. Trudie, with her specialised knowledge, decided to fight for recognition by writing a report 'professionally'. For Trudie, being 'good' is not necessary someone with qualification but rather someone who has significant responsibility and that is caring for someone else's child.

4.6 Summary

This chapter looked at the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) statutory framework and the ways in which nursery workers interpreted the policy. It highlighted how the policy 'made' the nursery workers act in certain ways in order to be 'good' at what they do. Whilst most of the participants talked about the importance of the qualification as it has the attachment of professional recognition, there is a sense of confusion about the EYFS (DfE, 2014a; 2017b) framework, which produced a tension in terms of appreciation of the specialised ECEC knowledge. While the framework was welcomed, the sentiments around the 'overdue' framework were mitigated by the participants that the reform had resulted in demands to alter their practice, sometimes in seemingly unreasonable ways.

The qualification was problematised in order to enable different understandings of how participants' formation of 'good' is currently shaped. In many ways the application of top-

down measures designed to enhance the quality of nursery provision was viewed as inherently benign and overwhelmingly positive. It can be argued that there has to be a place for complexity, values, flexibility, subjectivity, and multiple perspectives regarding what is considered a ‘good’ practice.

Qualification gives specialised knowledge to those participants who managed to get their degree; this has made a positive impact both on professional practice and personal satisfaction. Narratives revealed that there was a notion to move from the label of ‘babysitter’ ‘to a more professional role which can be achieved by obtaining a relevant qualification.

Chapter 5: Maternal discourses and the formation of 'good' nursery practice

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the discourses of maternalism and the construction of the 'good' nursery worker. The most prevalent themes participants discussed were around the 'feminised' nature of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and the strong link between motherhood and nursery practice. As outlined in Chapter 2, Cameron et al. (1999: 8) argued about the widely accepted form of nursery practice as 'mother-care'. Ailwood (2008) also discussed the link between motherhood and ECEC practices. In this study, gender was made visible through the language participants used within the narratives, as many references were made to motherhood, be that personal experiences of being a mother, of not being a mother or taking up a role of a mother. Participants also talked about the differences between male and female nursery workers.

In order to recognise the ways in which nursery workers see and understand 'good' practice, I draw on feminist work of identity where the 'self' is at central importance and whereby individuals are moulded by their multiple identities and experiences (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990).

5.2 The influence of maternalism on nursery work

During the interviews with the nursery workers, the notion of maternalism was a recurring theme. Many contemporary debates about the nature of the ECEC work are embedded in dominant narratives of maternalism and that nursery work is shaped by maternal discourses (Ailwood, 2007, 2008; Osgood, 2012). It has been argued that these assumptions still persist today as part of a wider deficit conceptualisation of the value of caring work, as it was still compared to the caring for people's own child(ren). When I asked the participants to describe the care they provide, *mothers* were frequently spoken of as a group of people who were described as the primary carers for children.

Maternalism, and the glorification of male nursery workers, were recurring themes. It was repeatedly said that the investment and promotion of maternalism was embodied within the professional work. Although in some cases participants resisted this notion, the following examples show the close relationship between motherhood and nursery practice.

> *'I know those mums who had to go to work and who leave their children for the first time on Tuesday afternoon, I can really relate to their feelings and this is definitely because I am a mum. And because they know me and because I'm a mum they understand and feel that I understand them, so I can support them better'.* [Sharon, owner, manager]

As Sharon's account shows, her experience as a mother and as a primary carer for her own child, shaped her perception of what 'good' nursery and nursery workers means. In Sharon's view, her experience of being a mother has helped her to support the parents 'better' than perhaps those nursery workers who are not mothers. In this sense, the domesticated nature of nursery work that is negatively constructed as an extension of mothering skills (Osgood, 2012; Moss, 2016) can be exploited here, whereby the maternal characteristics of the nursery worker are seen as an asset. Similarly, Sandra suggested that she benefitted from being a mother, stating that:

> *'Because I am a mother, I am a better practitioner… my emotions are totally different to someone who hasn't got children, but who works as a practitioner with lots of children because I see it from a different perspective and I think that I am more emotional probably because I am a parent'.* [Sandra, nursery worker]

Sandra's narrative reinforced the conflict and tension between personal and professional that was located in the maternalistic discourse. Sandra believed, because she was a mother, this entitled her to say that she was better than other nursery workers who were not mothers. According to Arendell (2000) and Raddon (2002), a good mother will naturally care for her child in such way that the child can fulfil his/her full potential. Sharon and Sandra both constructed the notion of 'good' nursery worker based on their experience of being a mother, yet Sharon's focus turned to support parents' emotional needs, while Sandra claimed that she understood the children better. Ailwood (2008) asserted that women nursery workers, when working with children, invest in a mother-like identity in their work.

Both Sharon's and Sandra's performances can be further explained by reference to Foucault's (1984: 33) theorisation on discourse stating that '*while someone may be positioned as powerless by one discourse they may be powerful in another'*. For example, in Sharon's case, a mother could be positioned as experienced, empathetic and wise. Alternatively, they can be positioned as vulnerable and needy as they rely on the childcare services. For example, when Val spoke about the importance of nursery work she said that:

'Mothers needed to have care [available] for their children [in order] to go to work. I know how difficult it could be. When my children were small, I struggled a lot to find appropriate care for my two boys after I decided to go back to work. My mother helped me a lot, she is really great with them… Nowadays it is a bit easier because of the 15 hours free nursery places. This is a great financial help for the mums, and I also know that [parents] are very happy with us because they tell us …'oh I am so happy that my son is happy here' but I also know that our full-time children are with us from 8 to 6 every day, from Monday to Friday, yes, every day. I think it is a lot for a young child, they should be with their mother as well as with us.

***Eva**: Do you offer part time places for children?*

Yes, we do. We try to accommodate parents' wishes, but certain days are very popular days. For example Tuesday is the busiest day'. [Val, deputy manager]

The importance of the nursery work here was signified through the promotion of free childcare places (DfE, 2017b). The financial help that was provided for parents, mainly for mothers, was intended to increase mothers' participation in the workforce (DfE, 2017a). The link between childcare and workforce participation was evident; however, Val focused on her understanding of the good practice they provide, rather than on the wider vision of the economic drivers. Nursery was a place where the children went, and the role of the nursery worker was to provide good service for them and for their parents while they are at work. The dominant discourse was that mothers needed help, and the purpose of the nursery was to meet this need.

Val also highlighted in her discussion about how she constructs 'good' nursery work by stating that children in her setting were 'happy' (Johnston and Swanson, 2003). In addition, Val brought up the issue of children spending long hours in the nursery, stating that attending full-time nursery and having a child stay for ten hours a day was too long. With mothers returning to work, the role of the nursery workers in forming a special relationship between them and the children has gained significance (Brebner et al., 2015; Elfer and Page, 2015).

Val's account shows that she has drawn on her own experience as a mother which pervades the constructions of the nursery worker. Firstly, this is by stating that children need to be with their mother, which demonstrates the traditional view of mothers being seen as the single and most important carers for their child(ren) (Bowlby, 1998). Secondly, the nature of the nursery work is such that there is the strong link between maternalist and professional thinking (Ailwood, 2008). Therefore, to place a child in the

nursery, even for long hours, becomes legitimate, due to the state of the economy that necessitates parents to work.

Val's quote describes the tension with neo-liberalism and parents in the workforce. It raises another issue and that is the debate about part-time childcare places; in Val's view attending part-time was suitable for the children, as '*they should be with their mother as well as with us*'. This argument holds together the tension of attachment where the mother-child relationship is important (Elfer, 2008; Elfer et al. 2012). This is in line with the key worker approach (DfE, 2014a) in the nursery that acts as a replacement for the mother-child bond. Therefore, in the context of who is a 'good' nursery worker, this is someone who can provide and perform the strong bond and positive relationship between the nursery worker and a child in their care.

5.2.1 Nursery worker as a 'substitute mother'

Nursery workers, Moss (2006) argued, have been described as a substitute family member, as a 'substitute mother'. This understanding is related to the 'attachment pedagogy' (Bowlby, 1996), the idea that 'mother-care' is needed for secure development of the child. In its absence, non-maternal care needs to be modelled on a dyadic mother-child relationship. The early childhood worker as substitute mother produces a belief that the nursery workers' profession is both gendered and assumes that little or no education is necessary to undertake the work. This understanding is due to qualities that are distinctive to women such as the 'maternal instinct'. When participants were asked about who is a good nursery worker, they spoke about the importance of attachment, stressing the establishment of a good relationship between the child, their parents and the nursery worker.

The importance of attachment has a long history (Bowlby, 1998) and has been discussed by many (e.g. Leach, 2009; Page and Elfer, 2013), hence being imbedded in the EYFS (DfE, 2014a). However, such a general call for attachment relationships leaves a question about what sort of attachments and for what purpose should they be encouraged. Joyce for example spoke about her feelings about the place of babies in a full day care setting. She said:

> *'The youngest child in our care was a three months' old baby. She was so little and so fragile. I think, I would never be able to leave my child as young as this in the nursery'*. [Joyce, room leader]

This statement suggests that it was acceptable for older children to attend the nursery as they would be able to respond more to the nursery workers. This also stresses the importance of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1998) which claims that the child is best placed with the mother. Joyce continued saying that *'the key worker approach is very important but it is not the same as being the child's mother'*. Here the narrative underlines the statutory requirement of the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) of having the key worker approach in place; however, the connection with mother as a primary carer was prioritised. Although Joyce highlights the importance of the key worker approach which focuses on child development and emotional well-being, she also states that it cannot replace the mother. Foucault's (1988: 221) term '*conduct of conduct'* means to lead and guide how one should 'conduct oneself'. Rosa, by following the statutory guidance, 'conducts' herself in line with the required set of behaviours which is part of her 'professional conduct'. Such behaviour is almost invariably evaluative and normative against the set of standards (EYFS, 214a) by which Joyce's behaviour can be judged.

What was similar in the quotes of Val (who is a mother), and Joyce (who is not a mother) was the normative expectation that the child was best placed at home, especially when very young. This belief highlights the concern about the children in the nursery for long hours, as even for Joyce and Val who were working in the nursery, their view was that it was not ideal for children to have to spend such long hours in the nursery. Therefore, the suggestion that very young children should be with their parents, with this meaning their mothers as no one spoke about the fathers, was not unexpected. The discourse became apparent that nursery workers may feel they could never be quite good enough as nothing can replace the children's mothers. For example, their narratives were in relation to babies who were deprived of their mothers' care, and the length of time children spent in the nursery. The formation of 'good' practice in this case was in the nursery workers' knowledge of attachment theory which informed their key worker practice.

5.2.2 Relationship between age and good nursery practice

Various participants discussed how they developed an unexpected role in the nursery due to their age. The link between 'older' nursery workers and how younger nursery workers construct good nursery practice was evident in some of the narratives. Some participants explained how, by being older, this created tensions between them and younger staff members, but also brought comfort in their work place. Whilst each narrative was highly individual, they share some similarities. For example, Tiana had given up a career in order

to be at home with her four children. When her children grew up, she found herself in a position where she needed to find suitable work which was in a nearby nursery. Tiana found it hard to cope in the nursery where she was not in charge, especially when surrounded by younger practitioners. Nevertheless, she also spoke about how younger nursery workers asked her for help and advice when 'tricky parents' wanted to talk to them about their children.

> *'At home, I am always the person in charge and you go to work and suddenly I am not in charge, I found myself very much at the bottom of the pile and I think because I was older and there were lots of younger practitioners I felt a little bit uncomfortable to start with. I think all this is a bit tricky because some of the girls are much closer to my daughter's age than they are to me. But then I found myself turning into a mother role which was very interesting because I didn't think it will happen. Yeah, it actually happened.*
>
> ***Eva**: Can you tell me a bit more about this?*
>
> *For example, some of the girls came to me to ask for help especially when a tricky parent came in, they wanted me to talk to them, but they also asked me for a plaster or a hairband or tissue. They have looked instantly at me because "Well, she is a mum" and because they think you're a mum you're going to have a tissue in your bag'.* [Tiana, nursery worker]

Once Tiana adopted the mother role she felt secure and respected because of her age. The experience of being a mother has helped her to overcome the issue of 'not being in charge' as well as the realisation that her experience can be utilised if performing a parental role towards younger nursery workers. Tiana positioned herself in such a way that she gained confidence and was viewed as 'knowledgeable' by others seeking advice from her. However, Wodak and Meyer (2009: 34) stated that '*knowledge is conditional, i.e. its validity depends on people's location in history, geography, class relation and so on'*. As knowledge and identity are strongly connected, the knowledge of being a mother, for Tiana, gave comfort at work due to the caring role of nursery workers (Osgood, 2012).

Rosa, also talked about the 'mothering role' she adopted upon joining as a new member of the team in a nursery. She said:

> *'I definitely became a mother figure in the nursery. Yeah, without a shadow of doubt. They [nursery workers] come to me with everything. They come to me for paracetamol, for plasters, for hand gel, for sweets. They ask me if I can read their coursework. So I think it's just because I was older they thought I knew what I was talking about. Actually, just because I'm older, it doesn't mean I know what I'm*

talking about. I must admit the whole nursery dynamic has changed a bit. But I also think that I'm not afraid to voice my opinion'. [Rosa, room leader]

Both, Tiana and Rosa spoke about their own and other nursery workers' age. Their position of 'being older' and 'being a mother' made them adopt a mothering role in relation to younger nursery workers. Following Davies' (2008) idea of subjectification, it becomes possible to understand why Tiana and Rosa are drawing on the 'mother' as subject, where they become subjected to the norms of motherhood. As a result they felt more confident, and somewhat important in the setting as their experience has not jeopardised the 'professional' nursery worker. Their age and their experiences as mothers added another dimension to the construction of good nursery work.

Gill, however, was much more focused on the ways in which younger nursery workers behaved in front of the parents. Similarly Gill said:

'They [nursery workers] always come to me asking me to talk to the parents, so I almost felt I was mothering a little bit you know… which was OK to a certain extent. I was happy to help to a certain point'. [Gill, co-owner, manager]

While Gill was 'happy to help to a certain point' she also found it frustrating as she continued to say:

'But my role turned into supporting the staff especially the younger practitioners, which was really like herding cats to show them how to behave in front of the parents. I thought I can show by my actions and by modelling how to behave [and] I hoped they would learn'. [Gill, co-owner, manager]

Foucault (1997) stated that individuals' subjectivity changes over time through the ways in which individuals are positioned and how they position themselves. Gill positioned herself as a manager rather than a mother, as she felt she needed to show and model to younger nursery workers what in her view was good practice. By doing so, she has reinforced the gendered understandings of nursery work as mother-like. Instead, she wanted to demonstrate what 'good' practice was by modelling the required behaviour. Dean (2010: 18) claimed that such behaviour presumes that it is possible to regulate and control behaviour rationally, and that '*there are agents whose responsibility it is here to ensure that regulation occurs*'. In this sense, this is Gill's professional 'code of conduct'.

5.2.3 Non-mother nursery workers' narrative and their construction of 'good' ECEC practice

Foucault (2001) argued that discourse exists with resistance. Generally participants constructed their understanding of a 'good' nursery worker as located in the maternalistic

discourse. However, not everyone subscribed to this belief. For example Linda spoke enthusiastically about her 'hard work':

> *'I've been experienced enough to know about childcare. If you've trained enough, and if you've worked in the childcare, I think being a mum doesn't necessarily have an impact on your work. But the parents think it does.*
>
> ***Eva**: In what way? Can you tell me more about this?*
>
> *The parents say "you're not a mum; you don't know what I mean". No, actually, I've looked after children for nine years. And during that time, I've learnt, I know a little bit about childcare. I would not be a room leader for no reason. Actually, I've probably looked after more children than you've looked after. You've got one child you've looked after. Probably me, a hundred of children in my nine years. So there is a big difference… And I have completed training, worked hard, so I must know what I'm doing to get to this point. And I'm a room leader and I worked hard for it. I must have shown something actually to be able to get to this position in the nursery. Not all of [the parents] asked me, but they said to me "You are a room leader and you haven't got a baby. You don't know what you're talking about." Yes I do know that what I'm talking about'*. [Linda, room leader]

Linda expressed her feelings by giving a specific example of parents questioning her professional ability. In her narrative, she has mentioned hard work several times; therefore she established a category of nursery workers as 'hard workers'. Linda said that she worked hard to earn her position in the setting as a room leader by building up nine years' experience in addition to gaining a qualification (training) while working. Linda recognised that her hard work was not sufficient to be valued as a nursery worker by some parents as they put her in an uncomfortable and marginalised position ('*you are not a mum - you don't know what I mean*'). This position has also been recognised in the literature (e.g. Moss, 2006; Osgood, 2012) where hard work has been linked with poor working conditions, lack of financial award, and lack of respect.

Another example of resisting the identity of 'maternal' was seen in Ana's narrative. She strongly disagreed with the idea that having children would qualify someone to work in the nursery. She spoke proudly of not being a mother and considered herself 'good' because she was more flexible than her colleagues who had children.

> *'You are trapped with little prospect to be promoted. Once [you are] a mother, and want to come back to work you accept the job at a lower level, and you may or may not be able to slowly build up your career again… I don't want to be in that position. At the moment I am flexible to work including evenings, covering parents evening and so on.'* [Ana, nursery worker]

In this account, Ana talks about her older colleagues who had children and when they returned to the nursery to work they faced 'little prospect to be promoted'. Although maternity and paternity leave can be taken with equal rights, normally the lower earner will remain with the child. Naumann et al. (2013) showed that the employment rates for mothers and fathers with a child under six were 59.4% and 88.0 % respectively which indicates that a higher proportion of mothers were lower earners, and therefore they become the main carer for their child. It is therefore not surprising that the normative assumption is that women (re)negotiate their job more than men because of the childcare (Lynch et al., 2009). This position was adopted in Lauren's narrative. The difference between Ana's and Linda's narratives were that Linda wanted to be a mother and was ready to (re)negotiate her job options, while Ana was rejecting this scenario. Ana's positioning was informed by the neo-liberal framework in which the nursery services were provided through the market model. Her approach of being 'flexible to work above and beyond' gave another dimension of the 'good' nursery worker; it disrupts the dominant discourse of the traditional assumptions of seeing the nursery work as 'mothering' (Osgood, 2012), but raises another issue. In the neo-liberal framework, the '*worker is unencumbered by care responsibilities, freely available to play the capitalist game'* (Lynch and Lyons, 2009: 91) in which the concept of the idealised worker is closely aligned with the conceptions of giving up free time. This was an expectation of some of the managers and owners who participated in this research.

Many of the participants were nursery owners or co-owners. Their primary task in a market system is to ensure financial viability. This is a precondition to running a business, due to variations of supply and demand for nursery places and due to staff shortages (Lloyd and Penn, 2014; Bonetti, 2018). Besides providing good quality care for children the financial issue was a continual source of anxiety and stress for the owners. Sharon, for example, whose role as a manager and co-owner involves ensuring that the setting is financially running smoothly, introduced new rules. She also saw the role of the mother (and not the father) as someone who can and will stay at home to be with her child when they face financial difficulties.

> *'Look, at the end of the day I have to balance my books. I introduced a 'no pay, no care' rule. I had to. I really thought about it, and came to the conclusion that the child will be with their mother at least'.* [Sharon, owner, manager]

For Sharon, balancing the books, and paying her staff were very important and her decision was justified by her moral stance that the child '*will be with their mother at least*'. The complexity of providing good quality care, ensuring that the nursery is 'Ofsted ready' and at the same time that the nursery is financially healthy was evident in Sharon's narrative. Nevertheless, there was a difference between 'no pay no care' and the genuine maternalistic approach to child rearing, and her role as an owner which also involved looking after the nursery's financial health. This highlights several issues in a current political and economic situation in England. For example, there is the consideration of the instability in providing 'care for profit provision' (Lloyd and Penn, 2014), the cost of the childcare/nursery fee and mothers' participation in the workforce (Chevalier and Viitanen, 2014).

5.3 Relationship between motherhood, professional, and good nursery practice

The notion of professionalism in ECEC has become one of the key components in recent years (Osgood, 2012; Urban et al., 2012). There is considerable debate about feminist values with regard to subjectivity and the recognition of individual experiences (Weedon, 1987: 125). Weedon argued that '*Foucault's work offers feminism a contextualisation of experience*' through which women's experiences can be addressed, and how it relates to nursery practices. It is this context in which Sue spoke about her understanding of 'good' nursery work, by stressing the importance of differentiating between her personal experiences, and professional work.

> *'I didn't want anyone else to think 'oh because she has got a son there', 'he is sitting on her lap again', or this sort of thing… and because other people had children in the setting they would say 'oh look, she is with her daughter all day and she is following her around'. So, I was quite conscious of keeping the professional and personal space more separate you know, especially when I was promoted. I worked hard for that promotion'.* [Sue, deputy manager]

After Sue had her baby, she changed her career from a financial advisor role to the role of a nursery worker. In Sue's narratives, the change of her career was to accommodate her son's care. By accepting a job that was a more convenient employment as it solved the childcare issue, she re-negotiated her possibilities. Her decision to work in the nursery after becoming a mother, was not unique. Osgood (2012) also reported that the majority of the participants in her study had chosen to work in the setting where their children were attending. For Sue, it was very important to be seen as a professional as it implies a

specific knowledge, expertise and the holding of an institutional position that places professionals in a position of power over others.

While Sue has managed to blur the binary between maternalistic and professional, Trudie stated that children in her care were in 'better hands' than for those nursery workers who have not got children themselves.

> *'I feel guilt that I kind of left [a child in the nursery], as I haven't been there, I haven't read to him or focused on him; I probably could have helped him and, perhaps, better than other practitioners'.* [Trudie, owner, manager]

The feeling of guilt for not being able to be in the nursery to help a child better than other nursery worker who are not mothers, confirmed the dominant discourse that women working in nurseries are judged or valued, based on their maternal qualities (Ailwood, 2008). This undermines the qualification debate where the maternal qualities become dominant over the actual knowledge of working with children. These debates rehearse the tension between the identities of mother/nursery worker.

5.4 Men in the nursery

Male nursery workers and their experiences of working with children in comparison with female workers shows how deeply gendered the nursery work is. When I asked the participants to describe 'good' nursery work, most of the participants described how good men were when working in the nursery. They described men as '*really great'* (Melissa), and that their style of working in the nursery was unique because *'he did things with the children that wouldn't even occur to me to do'* (Sharon). By doing so, they highlighted the gender division, indicating that women themselves contribute to the wider perception that when men work in the nursery this is something extraordinary. This is in line with Brody's (2014) findings and Cameron et al. (1999: 8) who stated that '*men are glorified'* as their approach to caring work is undertaken in a different style to that adopted by the women workers.

5.4.1 Men as 'excellent' nursery workers

Some of the participants in this study expressed their wish to recruit men to address the gender imbalance in terms of the nursery workforce, while others spoke about the different approach to caring work that was adopted by men compared with their female colleagues. Sharon, for example, when talking about good nursery practice, was articulating why she wanted to recruit a man. She said:

> ‘*Once I recruited a man, and he did things such as build a sword from Lego and climbed up a tree with the children. These activities wouldn't even occur to me. It would be a wonderful thing to have in the setting a male practitioner as a permanent member of staff. I know they are not the best with completing the paperwork, but I can sort that out… I want to recruit a man but they’re just not coming through the door. This is when you need to look at the financial side of the job, and this is when the government needs to change’*. [Sharon, owner, manager]

Although the concern about the lack of men in the early years sector has been discussed by many (e.g. Brody, 2014; Burn and Pratt-Adams, 2015) the quote shows that Sharon’s main concern was to recruit a man as men ‘do ECEC practice differently’. Acknowledging that *‘[men] are not the best in completing the paperwork’* Sharon negotiates and mitigates this issue by offering her support. Sharon also mentioned that the reason men were absent from the nursery was lack of pay reward, and she called for a change from the government. In this sense, ‘men’ appear as a special group of people who work in the nursery, thus showing that the concept of ‘othering’ (Ozbilgin and Woodward, 2004) operates in individuals and groups as well as within nurseries and nursery practices. The construction of a ‘good’ nursery worker, therefore, was assumed on the basis of seeing men in a non-traditional working environment in which ‘othering’ occurs.

Another example of men been described as unique was Bea’s understanding of ‘good’ nursery work. Bea said:

> *‘The two best practitioners I have ever seen were both male practitioners [because] the methods they were using when working with children worked as miracles really…David was very soft, a very lovely person, he adored children, he had 3 children himself so he had that parenthood understanding. And the boys would listen to him so much … he was excellent with children and he had a better influence on the [boys] than some of his female colleagues’.* [Bea, assessor, manager]

Through Bea’s description of nursery workers who were men, and who were working in the setting when she was a nursery manager, it can be argued that men bring to the care profession something what women do not. The ‘glorification’ of men makes women and their emotional investment ‘invisible’. Bea states that ‘David is a very soft, very loving person’ where the concept of caring was well formulated. This makes David’s practice ‘*excellent with children’* as he had a ‘*better influence on boys’*. This was in contradiction to the traditional view of male nursery workers who are constructed as powerful and unable to perform a caring role (Burn and Pratt-Adams, 2015). For Bea, the two best nursery workers adopted a different working style to their women colleagues, and these

were ones that worked better than the 'traditional' way of ECEC. As a result, 'good' or even excellent nursery work was built on the feminine caring abilities that David has.

The gender difference, and the belief that male nursery workers were different continued to surface in the research findings. For example when I asked the two male participants in the study about how they felt as the only men in the nursery, they both mentioned the difference that they believed they brought to the nursery care. Their inclusion in the study highlighted the normative assumptions that characterise the ECEC in relation to the mixed gender workforce.

> *'Having a male nursery practitioner, from the female practitioners' perspectives, they [the females] seem to really like it. It gives you that other dimension and I think the children like it as well as we bring something else to the nursery* [Alexander, co-owner, manager]

> *'I think as male practitioner, we bring something different to the industry. There are not many males in childcare, and of course we know the reasons for that; it's not a well-paid job. And of course, most men don't have the patience to work with many children and so forth'.* [Chris, nursery manager]

By stating that they '*bring something else'* into a setting, Alexander and Chris acknowledge the gender division of labour that makes their masculinity visible. The complex interaction between the nature of the work and their gender identity highlights these differences. By saying that '*it gives you that other dimension'* (Alexander) the question is raised: which other dimension? It may be the non-emotional, masculine part of the nursery work that detaches nursery workers from a widely held assumptions that being a mother is good enough to do nursery work. It could be also argued that men bring to the setting the management ability which is built on a more masculine perception of the care work. This is highlighted by Chris saying '*most men don't have the patience to work with many children'*. This would point to the assumption that the caring and emotional part of the job was still the role of women. It also showed, as Thomas (1993) highlighted, the gendered character of care work and that the majority of care workers are women. Particularly within feminist research, gender is the key social identifier for this dimension of care.

It can be argued that working in the nursery does not mean just being present and doing the day-to-day work of caring. The 'hands on' work that contributes to the quality and the management of the office work also contributes to the construction of 'good' services and

nursery work. Recognition of the skills nursery workers bring to the setting is essential, yet for many participants in this study the formation of a 'good' nursery worker was described through gender. This also shows that women in nursery work are 'invisible' due to the feminised nature of the ECEC (Cameron et al., 1999; Osgood, 2012). This could be a result of the rarity of men working in nurseries and in reception classes (Burn and Pratt-Adams, 2015) that underlies the social myths that women are naturally better at working in nurseries or with young children. However, as it explained above, it has a negative connotation as this belief can make women nursery workers 'invisible'.

The principal assumption is that men working in the field of ECEC and education must be gay. In the previous quote, Bea, by emphasising that David is a father of three, confronts the social myth that men working in the childcare field must be gay or paedophiles (Cameron et al., 1999). This point was raised by Emma.

> *'I think male teachers and male nursery practitioners are stigmatised as gays or paedophiles and I don't think it is right. They should be able to work free from these kind of comments. I think the importance should be on the skills we bring and not on who we are'*. [Emma, room leader]

Bea, by stressing the importance that David had three children himself, and that he is a father therefore he also understand parents, dismisses the myth that males working in the nurseries are either homosexuals or they have ill-intentioned motives (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015). Bea's positioning drew upon normalising discourses of heteronormativity, and professional ECEC work that is opposing the widely accepted form of 'mother-care'. The moral panic and the culture of fear that was created around those who show affection towards children in England (Campbell-Barr et al, 2015) in this sense becomes legitimised for those male workers who are parents.

5.5 Summary

This chapter investigated the relationship between maternalism, maternal roles, men in nursery, and 'good' nursery practice. Findings show that there were inconsistencies in the ways in which nursery workers described their construction of 'good' nursery worker. Some participants built on their own experiences, such as maternalism, that shaped their understanding and construction of the nursery work. The importance of attachment was discussed where some of the participants made it clear that it was desirable for the child to be with their mother. This view confirms the culturally and historically embodied belief of

attachment theory and maternalism (Ailwood, 2008) as well as the importance of the key working approach which supports the child's emotional well-being.

This chapter also discussed the views of those who strongly felt the maternalistic approach devalues the ECEC workforce and their professional ability to make decisions on how to care for children in their nursery. Nursery managers formed a slightly different construction of the 'good' nursery practice as their approach to maintain the financially healthy nursery and to provide the good quality child care caused additional stress and anxiety.

Finally, the chapter discussed the historically embedded myth that working in the nursery determines the understanding of the gendered work and the differences between men and women. Childcare has long been and remains a predominantly female occupation in England (and beyond), and therefore when males enter the nursery their practice becomes 'visible'. The disproportionate number of female to male nursery workers appears to support a commonly held societal view that the work that nursery workers do is a feminised role. The belief that women are naturally different and better suited for some aspects of the nursery work, such as being more patient for example (Chris), was articulated through the different approach between men's and women's nursery practices.

Chapter 6: Emotional labour in nursery work

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and evaluates the third theme emerging from the study, that of emotional labour in nursery practice. All the participants in this study were asked to describe and explain whom they would consider to be a 'good' nursery worker. Additionally, they were asked what they felt made them good at their work, and what skills they needed to work with children. The investment of the emotional human capital to produce high quality 'good' service was spoken of by all participants. In particular, the connections between different kinds of emotions and affections were highlighted, such as love, passion, and the 'right attitudes' as part of nursery workers' everyday practice. These emotions, including personal cost and benefits of emotional labour, are discussed in the first part of the chapter. The second part of the chapter debates the impact of motherhood on nursery work, while the third part focuses on how nursery workers have to deal with parents' emotions when leaving their child in the nursery. Although all three sub-themes were interwoven, all strands had a particular uniqueness.

6.2 Emotional labour in nursery practice

This section explores the construction of 'good' nursery work which was closely connected to the emotional labour in nursery practice. Findings showed that when participants were asked to describe who they would consider a 'good' nursery worker, participants spoke about a kind of affection they developed for the children for whom they cared as a fundamental aspect of providing 'good' quality care. In the interviews, all twenty-two participants talked about love, being passionate, or being attached to the children. Some participants specifically used the word 'love' to describe the feelings that they themselves developed for the children in their care, and some participants used the word 'love' to describe their own job. Many of the narratives were likened to how they had to deal with the emotions of parents when leaving their child in the nursery.

Nursery workers' emotional engagement informed how participants constructed 'good' Early Childhood Education and Care practices.

6.3 Affection, love, passion, attitudes and attachment

6.3.1 Love for the children

Some participants specifically used the word *love* when talking about their emotions. The following extract from an interview demonstrated how Linda, for example, expressed her love when talking about a child in her care. She said:

> *'He [the child] was here from when he was just three months old until he left. I developed a real love for him because I remember him from the baby room and again when he came to the pre-school room. I do believe in emotional care that goes beyond 'just' caring for them and I do believe that it is possible for a carer to love a child and I think it can be very healthy and good for the child's experience because they need the security. They need an attachment and I cannot imagine myself working in a nursery where I cannot provide that'.* [Linda, room leader]

Linda's narrative demonstrated that she had developed a 'love' for a child in her care, which is more than *just* care, as she said. In this account the personal affection was described. For Linda, a good nursery worker is someone who offers 'love' and 'security' to the child. Therefore, her practice projects what she thinks is important when caring for children. Her story reveals that the job nursery workers do requires emotional investment. These kinds of close nursery worker/child relationships have been reflected within Elfer et al.'s (2012: 62) study where they asserted that '*babies and young children need holding, cuddling and lap time, all of which are the very essence of being in a relationship'*.

In an attempt to capture the discourses of 'love', Page (2009) introduced the term of 'professional love'. In doing so she distinguished mother's love from love provided in a care situation. It can be argued that the love Linda felt was 'professional love', focusing on the mother's perceptions of love and on the development of the trusting relationship between the mother and the caregiver. Linda distinguished her role as a mother and as a nursery worker and developed a complementary relationship between her roles. Her love for her child was very strong, which certainly demonstrated that this was something that shaped her professional role. For this very reason, Hochschild (1983) argued that women are more often employed commercially for emotion work, such as nursery work, because of their emotionality. Lauren also found herself in a position where she had to learn how to manage her emotions. This was achieved through self-reflection, through her emotionality which has helped her to recognise the difference between 'professional love' and love which was formed for her own child.

Another participant, Trudie, explained how she developed strong attachment for the children in her care.

> *'I am not proud of it but I get very passionate about certain situations. I think I take on other people's stuff, other people's problems, and then I want to help. It is not only an emotional thing, it is more, it is about love, yes love, because you are really attached to [the children] as they are not only a database. You as an individual person, you are attached to them at a personal level too'*. [Trudie, owner, manager]

Similar to Linda, Trudie also demonstrated her commitment to her role which was expressed through deep intrinsic emotions such as love. This was articulated in connection with her perceived duty to meet children's needs. By saying that she was not proud of being emotional, Trudie acknowledged the feeling of discomfort by openly using the term 'love' in a professional context. Page's (2011b; 2017) research suggests that love matters and that there is a need for practitioners to have loving relationships with the children in their care. The above stories demonstrate that working with children requires emotional investment that has long been noted as an important aspect of work in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and, as Page (2011b: 455) argued, it 'holds together' the sensitive nursery worker.

These narratives exposed that love is incorporated as part of a quality children's service which was important for people involved in the nursery. They demonstrate that the emotional element of the construction of the 'good' nursery worker was not perceived as personal but are indicators that emotionality is a required part of the formation of the 'good'. This is in line with Colley's (2006) argument that engaging emotionally is part of the nursery work experience. However, the existing debate surrounding emotional labour has focused on the management and expression of emotions in caring work (Bolton, 2004; Taggart, 2011; Laere et al., 2014).

6.3.2. Love for the job

As previously mentioned, some of the participants used the word love to describe 'good' nursery practice, and some had a strong view about who was the most appropriate person to work with children. The following extract demonstrates how these participants understood what good nursery practice is, and how they expressed having feelings of love for the children through their job. Furthermore, the intrinsic rewards of enjoying working

with children, and having close relationships with them were also expressed by Joyce and Melissa.

> *'Without expressing some kind of feeling, how can you be good? We have a lot of love to give in nursery, and I think this is something very rewarding if they [the children] would like a cuddle, they can come and have a hug. They are just so lovable even when they are cheeky. I don't think there is enough love to share. I love my job, I would never leave'.* [Melissa, nursery worker]

Melissa spoke about feelings and emotions as an important element of the construction of good nursery practice as well as about how rewarding it is when working with children. Melissa drew on particular images of children that were 'pure', suggesting Rousseau's natural, lovable, sweet and innocent child (Rousseau, 1991). This construction portrays the work as enjoyable, rewarding and well worth the effort. Boyer et al. (2012: 518) also stated that the connection between nursery workers and children can be '*deeply gratifying and rewarding'* for the nursery workers '*despite being hard and emotionally draining*'.

The above quote also demonstrates the importance of *love*. Melissa expressed having feelings of love for the job. Expressing emotions, especially love, is a contested concept in the UK. It can be argued that this is due to how emotional involvement with children is bound by a child protection discourse that is still present in England. Page (2018) explained that, in the UK, issues around child protection have dominated discourse, whilst close adult-child relationships have been under extreme levels of scrutiny. This was constructed in part by moral panic around touching, holding and kissing in early childhood settings (Piper and Smith, 2003) and by a culture of fear and suspicion surrounding adults who demonstrate affection towards children (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015). Elfer et al. (2012) also stated that the discourse of child protection added to the complexity of nursery workers' close relationships with children.

Sharon and Rosa's narratives were further examples where affection towards their job were explained. Sharon said:

> *'I love my job, and my role [as nursery manager] slowly grew to be my passion'.* [Sharon, owner, manager]

Similarly, Rosa who had just started her new role as a room leader in a baby room said:

> *'I am in the baby room for the first time. I thought I am not going to like it but actually I am loving it. I love this new role and I love the new setting'.* [Rosa, room leader]

For Sharon, love for the job grew and progressed to become a passion. Therefore, passion appeared to be a stronger feeling than love. Both participants talked about love, but their love for children was expressed through the love and passion for the job. It could be argued that this way of expressing affection shows awareness of the current political ideology of the professionalisation of the workforce (Miller et al., 2008; Osgood, 2012; Campbell-Barr et al., 2015b). The idea that being professional means containing emotions (Campbell et al., 2015b) was evident in Bea's account where she discussed love with some reservation. Bea works in a small nursery where she is a manager; however, she also works as an assessor. During the interview she expressed that she likes her managerial role, and that she would like to remain in the nursery, but she could not afford to. Bea explained that she was poorly paid, which became a key reason for her having two job roles at the same time. There is evidence that nursery workers leave their jobs due to poor pay and poor working conditions (Osgood, 2012; Moss, 2019).

In the part of the world Bea comes from (former Yugoslavia), working with children of all ages requires a degree level of qualification. She expressed her view about how she constructs a 'good' nursery worker in a way to include love, affection and relevant education, saying that:

> *'Loving is easy, especially saying that you love the kids; the job is not about that. It should be natural to work in the nursery with love. It is much more, it should be based on real knowledge and passion.*
>
> *This is what I look for [when assessing], they [the students] need to be passionate about it. It is their [nursery workers'] mannerisms, their personality, their enthusiasm and attitude which is vital. I feel that all staff should be minimum of level 3 qualified and above, with relevant maths and English GCSE's. I also feel that there should be more of a push by the government towards higher education'*. [Bea, assessor, manager]

She saw love as a natural, intrinsic part of the nursery work where the role extends to include '*loving the kids'* (Bea). Bea insisted that having a '*real knowledge*' was important alongside love, passion, attitude, and the right mannerisms. In her view, demonstrating affections as well as 'real knowledge' constructs a good nursery worker. Bea further stated that '*knowing how to meet the needs of the child is important'*. With knowledge-based practice, Bea's understanding of the 'good' nursery practice is more than 'just' a loving carer. As Campbell-Barr (2019) argued, in order to provide high quality and good

professional practice, knowledge is needed, so that children's needs are met by knowing what, and how to meet those needs that is more than an intrinsic affection.

Bea's account established a construction of a good nursery worker as, firstly, someone, who is knowledgeable, and secondly, someone who is passionate and affectionate. However, through her additional qualification as an Early Years Assessor, Bea opened up further career choices for herself. This issue was evidenced by Elfer (2015) who argued that, despite the important job nursery workers do, there is little career promotion prospects for nursery workers.

6.3.3. Right attitude(s)

Narratives revealed that to work in a nursery, more than just love and passion is needed, and having the right attitude was also required. Participants did not always discuss these qualities as separate from one another. The connections and intersections between love, passion and attitude are mapped through in the following discussion where Chris explained his vision about the nursery worker:

> '**Eva**: So, what is your selection criteria to recruit a practitioner?
>
> It's a number of things. For me it is their sort of desire, their attitude, and their passion to do what this job requires you to do. I wouldn't look much at experience as you can get experience. What is important to see is how they interact with the children. To me your staff member that's quiet, shy, it's not ….you know, you need to lose that, and lose your inhibitions about being *silly* working with children. It's their interaction, attitude and the fun to a certain degree, and their passion. Because again, I've seen many managers employ staff just because they need someone to make up numbers to meet the ratio. I don't think it's fair to the children and I don't think it's fair to the children's family. Because the children are not gaining anything from those practitioners. These years can either make them or break them'. [Chris, manager]

Chris's concept of a 'good' nursery worker includes appropriate and right behaviour, and having fun with children such as being '*silly'*. This links to Hochschild's (2003: 60) argument that commercialisation of feelings requires workers to adhere to '*certain rules as requirements of the role*'. Chris specified the appropriateness of showing certain type of emotionality to the external world. In these rules, emotions in private life and those in work life demand the nursery worker to display different feelings to match those required. When talking about attitude, '*the emphasis is on the individual behaviour on particular phenomena and the ways in which nursery workers respond in some preferential manner*'

(Rokeah, 1962: 12). They can act *'positively or negatively with respect to a certain phenomenon*' (Katz: 1991: 10), but attitude, as demonstrated above, is difficult to assess, as argued by Campbell-Barr (2017: 45). Campbell-Barr suggested that quality extends beyond qualifications; the '*less tangible attitudes that are often seen as innate for guiding nursery work'* also contribute to 'good' professional practice. Campbell-Barr (2017: 45) said that:

> '*Attitudes are bound by socio-cultural understandings of ECEC … highlighting the importance of bringing to the fore the tacit attitudinal knowledge that is assumed to exist for guiding quality ECEC'*.

In Chris's quotes, attitude was considered as an additional quality that nursery workers need to possess. His use of 'attitude' reflects on aspects of progression and action in the nursery. By separating '*interaction, attitude, passion and play'*, Chris indicated that attitude has a strong link with knowledge (interaction), emotion (passion), and skill (play), which adds to the increasing complexity of work in the ECEC sector. All these attributes exist in a 'good' nursery worker, yet, in a political and social policy climate, where priority is given to measurable outcomes and immediate efficiencies achieved through competition, it appears very difficult to recognise these concepts and their qualities.

Whilst most of the participants when describing 'good' nursery practice talked about developing love, passion and some kind of emotion for children in their care, there was another emergent discourse attached to this and that was their pay/salary.

> *'I think, due to the low pay and long hours my staff work, there has to be a certain level of passion and motivation for working with children, as the salary and hours certainly aren't tempting in any way. And because of this reason, I don't think it is attractive for males'.* [Chris, manager]

This quote overrides the emotional nature of the hard work in the nursery by addressing poor pay and long working hours (Moss, 2007). The dominant discourse is that nursery work is underrated and underpaid for their hard work, and love and passion working with children was the reason for remaining in the industry. Emphasis on money and a possible aversion to hard work contradicts with the values and with the construction of a good nursery worker that was elucidated by many participants in this study. In Chris's account, there was a specific reference regarding reluctance to work with children due to poor pay, especially for males.

Furthermore, Chris statement of '*I don't think it is attractive for males'* indicates that the nursery work is for females. Yet, the work nursery workers undertake does require competence, skills and knowledge (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015a and 2015b), but the inequalities for women are that women have been seen as natural carers who were working in poor conditions. The dominant discourse has been reinforced by seeing the welfare of young children as the primary responsibility of women.

6.4 Impact of motherhood on care: connection between personal and professional love

Most of the participants, who were parents themselves, likened their work to a maternal role and motherhood which is demonstrated in the following narratives. Participants' stories offered inside views of how they develop more love towards the child in their care after giving birth. They linked their personal experiences to how they see good nursery practice. For example, Gill revealed her strong attachment to a child in her care after giving birth. Although she carefully chose her words and spoke about her feelings without mentioning the word love, the extract clearly shows how she felt:

> *'You are attached to them personally and professionally. Since I gave birth, you do feel for them even more, when you go home especially when some of those children are on the child protection register and stuff. I do feel for them, when I go home I do worry about them in my head… I think you know, I work with my emotions. What I do, my work with children and so many difficult children yeah…with everything… wear my heart on my sleeve…but it is different at work to home. At work, the children aren't yours, and you can only do so much with them, but I do feel that you are forming such a close relationship with them, especially with some of those children [in need]'.* [Gill, co-owner, manager]

The role of emotional labour distinguished the difference between the maternalistic and professional discourse. This split was apparent where achieving the balance between the professional and personal self-involved emotional labour. Gill positioned herself from two perspectives, as a mother and as a nursery worker. Gill explained that the feelings for her own children and those she cared for were different. Gill's emotional response was in line with Hochschild's (1983) explanation, that a feeling or emotional response was self-induced that provided the basis of 'acting' or managing emotions. Hochschild also argued that emotional cues may be among the most important in human interaction. This is what Gill's account shows, especially when Gill used a metaphor 'I wear my heart on my sleeve', indicating that the emotional investment in her job was a big part of her life.

Edith also talked about how she felt after giving birth, and how she got more emotional, especially when she learnt that a particular child's safety was at risk.

> *'I felt much more emotionally, after giving birth, towards children, especially towards those who needed additional help, or who were on the child protection register. I experience things very deeply. I am very emotional. I have you know, very strong empathy towards the children. I have feelings of rescuing, wanting to take them home, wanting to be their carer, wanting to look after them. But if that empathy was becoming too strong, I have a good manager who provides good supervision and support to offload… I think since I have my own child, I've got to a place where I could separate work and my personal life'*. [Edith, deputy manager]

Similarly, Rosa's narrative was linked to a child protection issue and reveals her view about who she thinks is a 'good' nursery worker. She was comparing her passion with a maternal feel, despite not being a mother herself.

> '*You may not want to have children yourself but, for me, a good practitioner is if you have that feel for wanting to care for them especially when you know they are on the [child protection] register. The passion is that drive, and I think if you have that passionate feel then it is almost the same as maternal really, even if they [the children] are not your own'*. [Rosa, room leader]

Despite not being a mother herself, Rosa clearly demonstrated the connection to the primary nature of care, '*the archetype of the mother'* where caring is an obvious and invisible part of women (Taggart, 2011: 91). Rosa's account also resonates with Canella's (1997) work in which nursery work is linked to emotional labour, to the skills mothers and woman 'naturally' have. The connection in these stories were the child protection theme, as they rightly worried about a child who is on the child protection register. The additional concern about such a child shows that the emotional competences of nursery workers in the child protection sense is paramount, and that the construction of 'good' nursery worker goes beyond the nursery. According to Edith and Rosa, they could not disconnect from their job roles, especially when a child is at potential risk. This part of emotional labour goes unrecognised, which also forms 'good' nursery professional practice.

Arendell (2000) reported on nursery workers who are also mothers, blending their personal mothering experiences with professional knowledge and understanding, and sharing commonalities to build relationships with parents. However, Osgood (2012: 11) rejected a '*mother substitute'* model for nursery workers, arguing that the numerical dominance of women within the sector does not necessarily reflect the role of the mother.

Edith's, Gill's and Rosa's commitment on an individual level was distinctive and separate from intimate love. In all three cases the children were on the child protection register and, as Krane and Davis (2000) argued, due to the additional attention that these children require, the issues around child protection cases were 'taken home' by the nursery workers. Dealing with what Gill, Edith and Rosa felt, according to Hochschild (1983), requires emotional labour. Unlike physical work, participants' emotional labour is often unacknowledged and unvalued (Hochschild, 2003). In human life, emotionality is an important function that contributes to successful nursery staff and child relationships but it is often taken for granted. It also demonstrates that caring work is continuous, which needs engagement with the neo-liberal approach that uses a discourse of emotional labour and ECEC as skilled work (Bolton, 2004). This is due to Gill, Edith and Rosa being engaged more deeply with their roles as nursery workers for no additional financial rewards. This supports Bolton and Boyd's (2003) argument about emotional labour where the occupational rules were followed, but with the choice to engage more deeply in order to support the children in their care.

An example of how a person's feelings can change after giving birth was Tiana's story. Tiana always wanted to become a mother but it did not happen until she was 36 years old. After becoming a mother, she claimed that she had become more affectionate and, when asked to talk about her job role as a nursery worker, she replied:

> *'The birth gave me a break from my job which I missed, but it wasn't enough for me to want to go back to work and have my child in the nursery all the time. After I had given birth, I definitely became more affectionate towards children in general. There is a hierarchy of where I'd like my child to be; first it would be with me, then with my family and then it would be in childcare - probably a nursery. My mother, for example, has a similar background, professionally and also personally. I know that she is a very good carer. And I know she loves my child and I think the commitment and the one-to-one that my child gets from that experience will keep him very contained, very safe, very nurtured. And this is what I want to give to a child, love and a safe environment; a loving, caring and nurturing environment'.* [Tiana, nursery worker]

In this story, similarly to Gill and Edith, Tiana has spoken about her feelings after becoming a mother. Tiana also spoke about who she would like to care for her child. She likened her maternal role to her professional self. The dominant discourse of emotion in care related work typically revolves around maternal emotions such as gentleness, love and care, as Lynch et al. (2009) argued. Tiana acknowledged these emotions and, since

she became a mother, she said that she had become more emotional. This is in line with Winnicott's (1988: 32) suggestion that during pregnancy a mother develops '*a state of heightened sensitivity*' which continues to be maintained for some weeks after the baby's birth. Furthermore, Tiana's choice of childcare was implicit as it was encoded in her hierarchical order of care: '*first it would be with me and then with my family and then it would be in childcare, probably a nursery'* (Tiana). Her hierarchical choices of childcare places the child with the mother first, a mother who Tiana believes is perhaps more attuned to her child's emotional state than anyone else, who will provide the appropriate care for the baby. Tiana's feelings resonate with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) as she was expressing a depth of feeling. Bowlby proposed that a caregiver's own attachment security should facilitate responsive caregiving, whereas insecurity would delay it.

Page's (2011a) research concluded that mothers put a strong focus on love as a desired trait of a carer who looks after their children, yet love it is not always a term with which parents feel comfortable. Despite this suggestion, Tiana stated that she had developed a '*real love for [children*]'. Therefore, her concept of love was to meet the emotional wellbeing of a child, and that was emotionally engaged work, which Lynch et al. (2009:42) called '*love labouring'*. In this case, the construction of the nursery worker as a loving professional demonstrates that love is important, and resists the notion that love diminishes the value placed on care work. A love for children as the sole requirement to work in the nursery was similar to the construction of 'just babysitting' (Mikuska, 2014), as if love is all that is required, then anyone can work in the nursery. This discourse does not require a qualification but the ability to love and with it to develop the love for children. While love is an essential element of the construction of 'good' nursery work, understanding the policy, cultural and societal context in which ECEC operates in England is essential.

Tiana further expressed that this is what she would like to do in the nursery, to give love to children and through love to create a safe environment. However, by placing the nursery at the bottom of her childcare choice, it could be argued that her understanding of 'good' care may have been based on her experience of working in a particular nursery where, in her view, the practice was not at a high standard. Hence this is why she opted for a choice that she was more familiar with, which was her and her mother. Page (2014: 7) suggested that '*mothers place vital importance on the relationship between caregiver and the child'*

and that mothers want adults who '*care for their children to 'love' them*' although they do not always call the feelings 'love'.

Although the aim of this research was not focusing on class, this example illustrates how deeply the class system is historically embedded into a society. Vincent et al.'s (2007) findings showed that the choice of childcare reflects the understandings about 'appropriate' provision, with different views between the middle and working-class groups. The majority of middle-class families in their study opted for different care than nurseries. This was the case with Tiana's choice of childcare as well, as her story reveals the issue of organising and choosing the kind of care for her child she believes is the most suitable for her child.

While the above story demonstrates how being a mother for the first time can affect a person, with them becoming more emotional, which in turn can have an influence on the nursery practice, Alexander explained his feeling as a father.

> *'I'm very different with other people's children than I am with my own.*
>
> ***Eva**: In what way?*
>
> *With your children you hold how you were held. With holding I mean in a Winnicottian sense, so being held with eye contact, with connectivity, with emotional holding as physical holding in all those sorts of ways. I think when you're with your own children, you tend to be with them in the way your parents were with you. You can't help but intergenerationally transmit how you were nurtured onto how you would nurture your own children, whereas with other people's children you work in a much more theoretically informed framework'.*
>
> [Alexander, co-owner, manager]

Thornton and Bricheno (2006) and Brody (2014) suggested that, in general, males do not identify themselves with female-familial roles. Brody (2014), however, also described the changing culture in which the males are started to respect more familial cultural values. Nevertheless, their experiences in the nursery in maternalistic terms is somewhat different to those of female workers.

Alexander further explained how he feels about his children. He stated that:

> *'I think, that your children are almost seen as an extension of yourself to the point that if they do something naughty, you feel embarrassed… whereas with other people's children and other people in general, they are totally separate'.*
>
> [Alexander, co-owner, manager]

Chris, like Alexander, inhabits a different position from 'substitute mother' models of ECEC (Osgood, 2012). They both framed their identities with heterosexual parenting scripts. Chris's story started with the reflection on his daughters:

> *'I have two girls and we are really close and I am really, really close to them, I am very proud of them. But I try to treat other children fairly because my own children are very precious to me and I will do my best for them, and of course these parents leave their precious children in our care so we do our best'.* [Chris, nursery manager]

By stating that they have children of their own, this stressed the importance of heterosexuality. This kind of talk was also evident in Bea's account, previously discussed in Chapter 5, which not only rejects the maternalism, but generally describes men as being labelled as gays and paedophiles when working in the nursery. Alexander further stated that the emotional connection he has with the children in his care was more conscious, whereas the emotional connection he has with his own children was unconditional and unconscious. He related his feelings to the theory developed by Winnicott (1988), where the relationship between a child and mother is an unconscious process. Winnicott's idea was of a facilitating environment, created for a child by a 'good-enough mother', whereby the mother is supported by the adults around her.

For Alexander, there were distinguished differences between emotional labour and emotional parenting. The attachment to his own children was much more rooted in the core of the human being, while the professional role was more 'surface' based. Alexander also talked about his role when he was at work, separating the parenting, personal, and profession; '*other children and other people in general, they're totally separate*.' Of course, this statement does not mean that Alexander was not a 'good' practitioner, but both Chris and Alexander felt that being a father had not changed their professional role in terms of being 'good' or better at what they already do. They were both able to resist the dominant maternalist discourse, perhaps due to patriarchy dominance and due to feeling secure in their own identity, whereas female workers were caught up between the binary of mother/professional in care work. Within these two stories, the similarities were the binary division between personal and professional identity, in which the mother (private) – carer (public) relationship were argued.

6.5 Dealing with parents' emotions

Nurseries need to be attractive for working parents (mainly mothers) in order to 'sell' childcare places. Some participants spoke about how they dealt with parents' emotion during the *show around* of the nursery as well as during their child's *settling in* period. The importance of the attachment between the nursery worker and the child was stipulated to demonstrate to parents that their children will be provided with 'good' care.

Denise's story demonstrates one of her roles which was to 'sell' childcare places to parents. She explained the process through which good childcare service was illuminated.

> *'As the owner of a small nursery I do the show arounds. I ask parents to make an appointment to come and have a look around so that I can ensure there are enough staff to maintain ratios. But sometimes I do unannounced visits [by parents]. Showing around is a great opportunity to build parent-nursery relationship. They all come with lots of questions which I try to answer with confidence and professionally but also in a friendly manner to make them feel relaxed, comfortable and create the sense of feeling, that both they and their child is safe and important to us'.* [Denise, deputy manager]

Part of the nursery management role is to show the nursery to potential parents. Sharon's story demonstrated that for her, a good nursery has to have a warm feel, and needs to be child-centred. Sue also explained the importance of showing parents around the nursery; however, she highlighted some of the difficulties of this role, and that is dealing with parents' emotions:

> *'The first impressions of a nursery are very important. I want to make sure parents see that there is a warm atmosphere and the staff are welcoming. Some parents are really obsessed that their child would not be happy or would not settle and some are really afraid they will not behave like they used to. Some are afraid that the nursery would change the child. Show around is important for that first impression. I think our displays on the walls tell everything; there are plenty of drawings and paintings that our children have done themselves. This shows that we encourage children's creativity that is valued'.* [Sue, deputy manager]

The stories of Denise and Sue demonstrate that dealing with parents' emotionality begins even before a child starts attending the nursery. This can be linked to Bowlby's (1958: 194) attachment theory where he described this as attachment, as a '*lasting psychological connectedness between human beings*.' These two stories justify the 'key person approach' in the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) in the nurseries. As Elfer et al. (2012) argued, the close and bonding relationship between the nursery worker and child promotes the child's

holistic development where the nursery worker requires and needs insight into the emotional state of the child. Such an example of working with emotions is the key person's attunement to and emotional sensing of young children.

The emotional cost of leaving a child in the care of others was demonstrated by Ruth when she said: '*Sometimes we need to support the parents not a child'* and Gemma who spoke about the child who settled well. She said:

> *'The child is fine, settled well, but her mum is just so anxious. I know, it is natural for a mum to worry but they need to trust us, we know our job'.* [Gemma, room leader]

Both Ruth and Gemma spoke about the emotional cost of parents leaving their child in the nursery. They both explained the support they offered for parents which was considered important as they needed to be reassured that their child was in good care. From the data it could be that emotionally engaged work requires emotional labour as nursery workers perform complex practice in order to balance parents' anxiety as well as providing good care for parents' children.

Sharon, as a nursery owner and manager, spoke about the emotional service she provides for working mothers. She talked at length about her personal experience as a working mother, describing how she felt about leaving her children in the care of others.

> *'I felt like a kind of a grief when you hand over your child to someone else to look after. My daughter was my world and when I had to hand her over to be looked after while I go to work it was the biggest hurdle I had to overcome. Because I was pregnant with my second, I really didn't want her to go to the nursery but I knew she needed to socialise and this step will stay in my head forever. Oh dear [she started to cry…] … and eventually I had to quit my job'.* [Sharon, owner, manager]

For Sharon, the emotional cost mothers need to pay when leaving their children in the nursery was overwhelming; therefore, when she opened her own nursery, her focus was on the support of mothers who were in the same or similar situation as she was, as well as on the children. She drew her understanding and construction of the 'good' nursery worker from the maternalistic belief of 'good mother' (Raddon, 2002), as she decided to be with her own children whilst also working.

Additionally, mothers who return to work were engaged in emotional labour that involves organising, planning and finding appropriate care for their children (Reay, 2000; O'Brien, 2009). This is what Sharon was referring to when stating:

> *'...I know those mums who had to go to work and who leave their children for the first time on Tuesday afternoon, I can really relate to their feelings.*' [Sharon, owner, manager]

Another example of how participants support parents' emotions and anxiety was provided by Susan's narrative. Similar to Sharon, Susan drew her construction of the 'good' nursery worker from her motherhood experience.

> *'Being a mother and being a mature woman helps my job role [as room leader] because I look at the child differently. I try to take a step back and say to myself, "Hang on a minute, this child is somebody's child, and if I was their mum, I would want my child to be loved, well treated, spoken to, and listened to". So, I've kind of tried to take that view on the emotional side of things and, as a result, I can see how mums struggle emotionally, and perhaps I see them in a more empathetic way. I can relate to how they feel, and I know what it's like because I've been in their position'.* [Susan, room leader]

While the findings of this research showed how important affection and emotionality is, Dahlberg et al. (1999) provided an opposing view, stating that portraying nurseries as a place of emotional closeness where emotional labour is seen as an 'intimacy' can misleadingly combine a nursery environment with home environment. Whilst this argument of nurseries not being seen as 'home-from-home' and the nursery worker as not being regarded as 'substitute mother' is present in the literature, narratives suggest that a warm and loving nursery environment is essential for children, their parents, and nursery workers.

It is also in line with the EYFS (DfE, 2014) framework, which highlights the importance of providing a loving environment for a child that fulfils their attachment needs. The key worker system emphasises the child's emotional well-being and not the nursery worker's emotional involvement with children (Whalley, 2008). The concept of emotional labour in ECEC highlights the need for acknowledgment that working with emotions requires skill.

6.6 Summary

In summary, this chapter discussed emotional labour in nursery practice. It has considered the emotional aspect of nursery work such as love, passion and attitude as special qualities that nursery workers possess. Findings showed how emotional labour and working with feelings become integral parts of the everyday nursery practices and how nursery workers experience deeper emotional connections with the children in their care after becoming mothers. Similar to the study of Campbell-Barr et al. (2015, 2016), the findings also demonstrated that expressing emotions, especially love, is a contested concept in the UK. Narratives showed that the deep commitment and passion of nursery workers potentially undermines the recognition of nursery workers' professionalism and status. Importantly this raises the question of professionalisation of the workforce (Miller and Cable, 2012).

Findings also demonstrated that the emotional cost of leaving a child in the care of others requires a considerable degree of emotion labour for nursery workers in order to manage parents' anxiety.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter concludes by summarising the findings in relation to the research questions and aims. It considers the effect that the process of the doctoral study, including the emotional impact, has had on my professional teaching practices. Strengths and limitations of the study, professionalism in ECEC and professionalisation of the system, rather than the individual educator is addressed as well as the role of institutions in the initial professional preparation. Recommendations made about directions for further research in relation to good nursery practices.

7.2 Revisiting the research question, aims, methodological and theoretical approach

This research set out to investigate the ways in which 'good' nursery workers were constructed in the current political, economic and societal context in England. In order to conclude it is necessary to revisit the research question once more.

'What makes a 'good' nursery work(er)?'

In answering the research question, the research aimed to:

- Identify and analyse discourses of 'good' early years workers in relation to the policy documents and qualification.
- Explore the ways in which the notion of the 'good' nursery worker is gendered in relation to caring experiences.

Theoretically, the thesis has aimed to contribute to the literature through the conceptualisation of good nursery practice including policy and professional practice discourses. Since the ECEC workforce consists of mainly female workers, a logical starting point was to investigate gender and the gendered nature of the nursery work.

The narrative and theoretical approach to the research, and a review of the literature including the scrutiny of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2014a), helped to address the research aims. In terms of the first aim, the main focus was on examining the relationship and connection between the level of qualification and good nursery practice in relation to the statutory policy document. The findings revealed opposing views about the level of qualification nursery workers need to provide a good professional

service. Before the study I had a strong personal belief that every nursery worker should have a higher education qualification to work with children. The research findings have shaped my views, as I learnt how to re-negotiate my position by listening to rich and complex personal experiences in regards to qualification requirements. My findings suggest that to be a good nursery worker it is not necessary to have a qualification.

The second aim was addressed by critically analysing the qualitative data in relation to a good professional practice. The findings clearly support the notion that nursery workers develop emotional connections to the children they care for. Nursery workers' perceptions of providing a close bond with the children in order to meet their holistic needs are aligned with the current thinking that empathy, kindness, patience, affection, love, support, collaboration, and care are essential aspects of 'good' early years practice (Osgood, 2004; Page, 2011; Taggart, 2011; Elfer et al., 2012).

These findings contribute to the existing literature, and take the knowledge on further about participants' personal experiences of childbirth and child rearing as changing their emotions and shaping their professional practice.

7.2.1 Methodological and theoretical approach

The feminist position resulted in a heightened attention to issues of power and a commitment to reflective and reflexive research practices. The feminist methodological reflections offered in Chapter 3 indicate the significance of my subjective position throughout the entire research process, but notably during the qualitative interviews with participants. Rather than claiming to seek some authentic truth through scientific method, the next step was addressing the importance of reflexivity in research. This enabled an in-depth and sensitive approach to be adopted in the field.

The research was undertaken within a particular policy moment and consequently the examination of the construction of the 'good' nursery worker was against the backdrop of policy reform that is embedded within a specific context (Moss, 2019). However, the discourses identified from analyses of the data resonate with studies conducted in broadly similar contexts; for example, Ailwood (2008) in Australia, and Elfer et al. (2005) Osgood (2012), Elfer (2012), and Moss (2019) in the UK. Furthermore, a focus upon the subjectivities of nursery workers in the context of debating emotional labour has provided a starting point for further comparable investigations in England (Page, 2011a; 2011b; 2012; Taggart, 2011).

7.3 Main findings and the emotional thread between themes

Findings that emerged from the data support the view that working in the nursery is complex due to historical perceptions of the role being seen as a mother's job. Good practice in ECEC is conceptualised not as a single set of skills; it relates to a wide range of cultural, theoretical and practical ways of working with children. Understanding relevant policies, and being able to apply these policies effectively is one of the important attributes that constitutes good nursery practice.

Individual subjective experiences of nursery workers also demonstrated that working in nurseries involves, and indeed requires, emotional investment and emotional reward. However, it was concurrently recognised that good nursery practice needs to be understood at national as well as localised level and that the experience of working with children is determined by 'self' and 'other' through discourse. Overall, nursery workers' narratives presented complex intersections between professional and maternal, gendered and feminised work, providing a richer understanding of what good nursery practice is. These findings contrast with the way that government has suggested in the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) framework, that children's outcomes should be measured, and children should be prepared for school. This theme was analysed in Chapter 4 where the construction of good nursery work was linked to the ways in which nursery workers interpret and respond to policy requirements. Narratives and stories demonstrated that the language used in the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) statutory framework has a significant impact on the ways nursery workers are expected to behave. This has influenced nursery workers' professional identity and creative ability. Data analysis identified strategies by which nursery workers' practices and conducts are shaped and the technologies of the self that nursery workers are encouraged to apply in order to transform themselves into good nursery workers.

The second and third themes were closely linked and interwoven in terms of emotionality, attachment and the importance of bonding between mothers and children. The findings demonstrated that the ways in which nursery workers are constructed in public discourse rest upon maternal subjectivities. For example in Chapter 5 many participants told stories about their experiences as parents, which drew on Bowlby's (1996) attachment theory. The importance of attachment was made clear in discussions where some of the participants explained that it was desirable for the child to be with their mother. The findings from this research support the literature that promotes the importance of the key

working approach which enhances the child's emotional well-being (Elfer et al., 2012; Page, 2015).

Chapter 5 addressed maternal discourses, specifically how women and men construct good nursery work, and the way that the similarities and differences in their professional practice were highlighted through their narrative and stories. Nursery workers felt strongly that the maternalistic approach devalues the ECEC workforce, and their professional ability to make decisions on how to care for children in their nursery, and the implications of this were discussed. Findings also highlighted the historically embedded myth that working in the nursery determines the understanding of the gendered work and the differences between men and women. As a result, when males enter the nursery, 'otherness' occurs. These findings also support those of Cameron et al. (1999) and Cameron (2006), and show that, a decade later, this is still a case.

The third theme relates to emotional labour, which was discussed in Chapter 6, and this explains how emotional the role of nursery workers is. Recognising the relationships between emotions and attitude demonstrates that there is a desire to move beyond competence-based models, focusing on technocratic assessments of the workforce, to something much deeper which guides working with young children. Implications of the findings for the formation of professional identity lays in expressing and differentiating the private and professional. Findings demonstrated that to be good, a nursery worker needs to *love* the children they care for, which is in line with Page (2018).

Although specific emotionality such as 'love' is not used in the statutory framework, EYFS (DfE, 2014a), it is implied through the association with the care of children that are part of the feminine 'soft skills' (Canella, 1997). However, the existing debate surrounding emotional labour has focused on the management and expression of emotions (Van Laere et al., 2014) and caring work (Hochschild, 1983; Bolton, 2004; Taggart, 2011), not insisting on 'working with emotions' to be recognised. This could be linked to a series of implications that are associated with the professionalisation agenda in England (Urban, 2008; Miller, 2008; Lloyd and Hallet, 2010). Therefore, emotional labour as a skill should be more recognised as nursery workers need to support both children and their parents, as nursery workers had to learn how to balance their emotional investment in caring for children and their families with the maintenance of professional distance.

Building on the work of Osgood (2012) and Cameron et al. (1999), the thesis contributes to a deeper and more complex understanding about the gendered discourses of good nursery work. Prevalent across the participants' narratives of professional and personal experiences was the complexity of maternal discourses.

Overall, although the findings are based on a small population of nursery workers within a particular context in England, they contribute to the limited literature about nursery workers and their understanding of good professional practice in ECEC. The complexity of the discourses reflects the dynamic and complicated nature of work. The findings of this study support those of Elfer et al. (2012; 2018: 892) which indicated that nursery work is emotional and requires '*attention to emotion in work interactions'*.

7.4 Reflections on professional teaching practices and my identity

As part of my role as senior lecturer in one of the post-1992 higher education institutions, I was asked by the university if I was interested in enrolling on the Doctorate in Education (EdD) programme. I felt that this was an opportunity to pursue areas of research which are of direct relevance to my practice interests.

During the research process I was continuously seeking answers to my question, *who do we call a good nursery worker?* Answering this question requires working with a reflexive approach. As Andrews (2014: 8) pointed out, '*the construction of the self and other is ongoing'* and, therefore, throughout the course of the doctorate I have reflected on how my understanding of good nursery practice may have changed. Much of my reflection has taken place within discussion and professional conversations between me and my colleagues. Some of these conversations were recorded. I would listen to these recordings afterwards which allowed me to 'step back' and reflect on the construction of my own thoughts and ideas about professionalism, good practice, and how to raise the status of the ECEC workforce. Often, I was surprised by the way I was feeling during and after I had listened to the recordings, as well as after reading the written feedback from the supervisor. During the discussions, I felt 'vulnerable' and saw the constructive feedback as a criticism rather than a positive approach of how to improve. How I felt (positive or negative) made me re-think the ways I teach and give feedback to the students I am involved with. I became more of a 'listener' and 'problem solver' and a more reflexive and reflective teacher.

During the course of the doctorate, many people have asked me about what I was researching and why. Most of those who engaged with me about my research had some sort of view about who is a good teacher or who is a good nursery worker. They also asked me if I had thought about who was a bad teacher or bad nursery worker. This made me reflect more on the research question and the aims, as I frequently asked myself this question too; however, this exercise did not lead me to modify the research question. On reflection, I have become more aware of my differences to others, particularly relating to my own education and background as a migrant teacher. The ways in which the research process has influenced my own and others' understanding of good practice has made me more aware of who I am in relation to my personal and professional self.

The implications of the doctoral journey manifested how I have (re)positioned myself as teacher. Firstly, the research process itself and the research findings informs my teaching. Secondly, by reflecting on my experiences as a mature student, teaching mature nursery workers and teachers, I believe that I have evolved to be a better teacher with a greater understanding of this group of students. While this approach initially was unconscious, it became more explicit through my reflective diary which made me think about it in more depth. The personalised teaching approach is not new, but by doing doctoral research, the ways in which I see teachers' professional work has been significantly enhanced. Through my understanding of the discursive 'self', the importance of making the teacher's positionality explicit in their work, rather than pretending to be neutral and objective, is essential in the process of subjectification. The recognition that my past experiences, and new 'knowledges' are deeply embodied into my professional practices, gave me new ways of understanding my profession.

Furthermore, ethical concerns relating to the data collection have been rightly focused on care of the participants. However, I had not fully appreciated the inevitability of a redirecting of emotion to the self, or how the retelling of the participants' experiences might renew emotions linked to my own experiences. During some interviews I found myself deeply identifying with either the participant's retelling of upset or joy that I felt in their emotion. My connections were deepened by the participants' openness and generosity in sharing their lived experiences. I feel highly privileged to be able to present such rich data while also feeling a deep sense of responsibility to do justice to their openness. This experience influences the way I teach and supervise undergraduate

students (future novice researchers), drawing deeper attention to protect themselves as well as the participants.

7.5 The study's strengths and limitations

7.5.1 Strengths

The narrative approach to research involved twenty-two semi-structured interviews. They were especially valuable in meeting the feminist aims of the research as rich data were collected in which the voice of the participants came through. That is not to claim that those narratives or insider discourses offer an authentic 'truth'; however, through reflexive research processes, space has been created for nursery workers to articulate their views that is culturally, historically and socially specific.

Methodologically, the thesis contributes to a body of literature on the value of the attention to narrative approaches as a way of understanding the intersection between the personal and professional experiences. Drawing on the work of Esin et al. (2014: 205) about a constructionist approach, by addressing stories as '*co-constructed or dialogically constructed'*, this provided a way of exploring how nursery workers captured ECEC practices. This approach enabled the bridging between the discourses that nursery workers draw on in their understanding of good practice as well as exploring their professional and personal lives.

Additionally, the findings of the study contribute to the existing literature around ECEC practices, professionalisation of the workforce, feminised work, and emotional labour. The interpretation of the data illustrated that when researching in a different cultural environment than your own, understanding the narratives and stories of participants does reveal new knowledge and new ways of thinking. For example, one of the strengths of the study was a novel finding about how participants' professional practice alters after giving birth.

7.5.2 Limitations

This study involved a relatively small number of participants. To expand the study, a more diverse range of participants could have been recruited from a wider geographical spread. This may have provided a different cultural mix of nursery workers with different personal and professional experiences which could have provided other dimensions to this study. Additionally the possibility to unearth new discourses about nursery workers'

perceptions and understanding of good ECEC practices may have been achieved. However, practical limitations were in evidence, which precluded the study of a much larger sample across different parts of the country.

This study deliberately focused on the views of the nursery workers. Nevertheless some of the stories of the nursery workers and managers drew upon the expectations of parents and how they may construct 'good' nursery practice. For example, some participants described how, during the 'show around' of the nursery, they wanted to be perceived as confident, friendly, professional in order to gain parents' trust. Despite these occasional insights expressed by the nursery workers regarding parents' expectations of the 'good' nursery experience, it remained the intention throughout the study to primarily view this through the eyes of the nursery workers themselves rather than broaden the study to include the perspectives of others.

7.6 Recommendations for further research and development

The findings highlighted several specific areas for research and development that warrant further investigation. The need for changes in the ECEC workforce is recognised in many countries, especially those who have neglected the issue over the years, assuming that a female workforce with relatively low levels of training and pay was sufficient and sustainable. The ways in which recognition of the ECEC workforce is translated into action, and the re-visioning of the workforce is needed, which is a political and ethical choice that should start with critical questions about how the work is understood and what values are considered important.

Firstly, emphasis could be placed on research which provides nursery workers with opportunities to challenge and change existing discourses of how they have been seen and constructed as 'substitute mothers' or 'technicists' (Moss, 2008; 2010). This could entail studies which encompass the training and upskilling of nursery workers in how to become more reflexive and reflective as nursery workers. Giving nursery workers 'spaces' where they can critically reflect on their professional and personal lives may create opportunities for them to work with more confidence and creativity. It is anticipated that by doing so, nursery workers could gain the trust of the government to value their professional judgement about babies and young children in their care. In turn it could point the way to the greater recognition of nursery workers as professionals.

A number of countries have attempted to get beyond the historical childcare/education split, by moving towards or already having achieved an integrated approach to early years services. This process has gone furthest in the Nordic countries, Moss (2019) argued, all of which now have fully integrated services for children from birth to when they start school. This integration runs through all facets of the systems in these countries. Sweden, for example, locates responsibility for these services within one department and provides a universal entitlement to services for children from 12 months of age and applies a common system of funding and regulation. An integrated system of the ECEC in England is the way forward in order to tackle social injustice and poor social status.

Secondly, research on the greater involvement of nursery workers in the policymaking and implementation process is desirable. This could be achieved in part through incorporating specific educational opportunities (at degree level) for nursery workers that are recognised and recommended by the government. The Nordic countries, for example, offer one possible direction for the early years workforce in which a substantial group of graduate workers forming the core of the workforce, who can either be pedagogues or teachers.

While attempts to upskill the ECEC workforce in England have been made with the introduction of the Early Years Teacher status (Miller, 2004), the implementation of the strategy to have graduate nursery worker in every setting (CWDC, 2006) was not successful. Most of the other OECD countries that have sought to integrate early years services within one policy area have similarly moved towards an occupation with a high level of qualification, working directly with children under and over three and in all entre-based settings.

Replacing a split English system with an integrated system and workforce with a new core graduate occupation comes with the increased costs. The question rightly can be asked as to who would pay. In a market system (Lloyd and Hallett, 2010) where many early years services are treated as private commodities for parents to purchase nursery places as consumers, an integrated workforce based on pay parity with school teachers cannot be funded from parental fees. Nursery work should be supported by tax-based public funding.

Thirdly, in relation to the nature of research itself, undertaking future studies with a larger sample, including international samples, would enable a more diverse population to be included, and allow comparison across nursery workers of different countries and ethnic groups, including race, culture, gender and religion.

In terms of developing the role of nursery workers, by designing new programmes for upskilling nursery workers as well as ECEC providers, universities need to be looking at other ways they can engage with nursery workers to find opportunities for development and learning in which the emotional aspect of nursery work is addressed. Such practices could be employed in the development and enhancement of the teaching of existing courses (such as foundation degrees in early years). Although the current government claims it is committed to investing in and valuing nursery workers (DfE, 2017b), attempts to professionalise the early years sector have been met with limited success. Despite professional routes, such as foundation degrees (DfE, 2017b), most nursery workers remain qualified to a low level. Staff turnover within the sector continues to be high, largely due to issues of low pay, lack of progression and access to affordable and accessible training.

In conclusion, the richness of the narratives in this study suggest that nursery workers are a dedicated and passionate group of people whose aims are to provide best care for the children in the nursery. Despite relatively poor pay, status and conditions, alongside limited prospects of career progression, they remain working in the nursery, as some of the participants said, due to their passion and love for the job.

This study was born of a desire to bring to the fore the voices of the nursery workers and managers of nurseries, in eliciting their views about 'good' nursery practice and their roles as 'good' nursery workers. The argument is that the future of the workforce needs to encompass restructuring and rethinking, in terms of addressing the relationship between the workforce and professionalism. Professionalisation of the workforce should shape current understandings and structures of the ECEC workforce. It is hoped that through this thesis, and current and subsequent publications and dissemination, this aim will be achieved.

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Appendix 1

Key Authors

Key words	Hits with Google Scholar	Hits with Dawsonera
ECEC policy England	4060000	1987
Good nursery work	497000	98
Early years workforce	1450000	96
ECEC services England	5920	79
Early years workforce professionalisation	17200	50
Early years workforce emotional labour	14400	2
Early years policy England EYFS	5180	97

Most cited authors	Google Scholar / Dawsonera
Peter Moss	915 / 361
Jayne Osgood	660/ 16
Linda Miller	260 / 496
Geoff Taggart	241/ 24
Peter Elfer	198 / 19
Jo Ailwood	163/ 2
Mathias Urban	130 / 56
Verity Campbell-Barr	101 / 12

Appendix 2

Search terms and items identified

Key words	Hits with Google Scholar	Hits with Dawsonera (University e-book and e-journal)
ECEC policy England	4060000	1987
a. Early years policy + England + EYFS	5180	97
b. EYFS + Early Years Workforce Strategy	1350	3
c. ECEC policy England + poststructuralism	521	0
Early years workforce	1450000	98
a. Early years workforce + professionalisation	17200	50
b. Early years + nursery work + gendered work	18000	12
c. Men in nursery + England	11900	4
d. Early years workforce + poststructuralism	13700	3
Good nursery work	497000	96
a. Good nursery work+ emotion	120000	34
b. Early years + emotional labour	62100	6
c. Good nursery work + poststructuralism	5600	5
d. Nursery work + emotional recognition + professional love	2100	2
Nursery work quality	484000	79
a. Nursery work quality + qualification	54000	21
b. Nursery work quality + poststructuralism	4400	5

Appendix 3

Information letter

Qualitative research: Nursery workers' narratives: What makes a 'good' nursery worker?

I am a doctoral student writing to invite you to take part in a research study about how early workers constructs the notion of a 'good' early years worker. This study is part of a research Doctorate in Education programme, coordinated by the Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE), based at London Metropolitan University. I am asking for your participation in order to contribute to the wider current policy debate on the construction of a 'good' early years worker and to inform policy and practice in the early years field.

The interview will be between 45 minutes to 1 hour. The interview will take place at the location of your choice. The interview will be tape-recorded. Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw your responses at any stage of the research study. You will be given a consent form prior to the interview.

Your contribution will be confidential, and neither the setting you are currently employed or mentioned in the interview, nor individuals will be named in subsequent reports or literature. All responses will be anonymised. All the data will be stored in a locked room and password protected electronic files.

The study has been given ethical approval by London Metropolitan University's Ethics Committee. For more information, please email Eva Mikuska at e.mikuska@chi.ac.uk or call me on 07900 987874.

I look forward to meeting you.

Best wishes,

Eva Mikuska
Doctoral student

Appendix 4

Qualitative research: Nursery workers' narratives: What makes a 'good' nursery worker?

CONSENT FORM

I understand that:

- The aim of this project is to gather information on nursery workers experiences of addressing the constructions of the 'good' nursery work amongst early years workers
- My participation in this study will be in a face-to-face interview which will be recorded and last about 1 hour.
- My participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from participation at any time.
- The information gathered from me will be anonymous and no setting name will be mentioned (no one will be able to identify which responses I have given).
- The data collected may be used for publication in subsequent reports, journal articles and any other literature.

I agree to take part in this study, and I accept that the information gathered from me will be used in academic and other literature to contribute knowledge to the field of early years in relation to construction of a 'good' nursery worker and to inform policy and practice in the early years field.

Name: _____

Signed:_____

Date:_____

Appendix 5

Research Interview Questions for MANAGERS

1. Tell me a bit about yourself
    a. Probe: How long you have been a manager?
    b. Can you tell me what your future plan is?

2. Tell me about the setting you are currently managing
    Probe: Location, size, type (VIP),

    How did you approach the setting?

3. Tell me a bit about your role in the setting
    Probe: What do you do? What are your responsibilities?

4. Tell me about the employees in your setting (gender/qualification/role)
    a. Do you have volunteers working for you?
    b. Can you explain the recruitment process?
    c. Tell me about your expectations from the staff.

5. Can you describe me a good nursery worker? in terms of values, expertise, attitude, professional relationship and actual practice)
    Probe: What do you mean by…

    What is your thought on having a relevant qualification? CPD?

    What is your thought on experience of working with children? Is it important?

    What is your thought on age of early years practitioners? Is it important?

    What is your thought on being a mother? Is it relevant?

    What is your thought about early years practitioners' attitude/passion to work with children?

6. What are your thoughts on the practitioner's confidence in completing the paperwork and in understanding new policies?
    a. Educational Health Care Plan
    b. Progress check at age 2

Appendix 6

Research Interview Questions for Nursery Worker

1. Tell me a bit about yourself
    a. How long you have been working as an EYE?
    b. What was your role before you became an EYE?
2. Tell me about the reasons / motives you became an EYE?
    a. Can you tell me what your future plan is?
3. Tell me about the setting you are currently working in.
    a. Probe: Location, size, type (VIP),
    b. Any volunteers in the setting? EYT?
4. Tell me a bit about your role in the setting
    Probe: What do you do? What are your responsibilities?

5. Tell me about the staff in your setting. How do you get on in the setting on the whole?
    Probe: can you describe how you been received in the setting by the parents?

6. What do you think makes a 'good' nursery worker?
    Probe: What do you mean by…

    What is your thought on having a relevant qualification? CPD?

    What is your thought on experience of working with children? Is it important?

    What is your thought on the age of early years practitioners? Is it important?

    What is your thought on being a mother? Is it relevant?

    What is your thought about early years practitioners' attitude/passion to work with children?

7. How would you describe a 'good' nursery work(er)?

8. What are your thoughts on the amount of the paperwork early years practitioners need to complete?

9. Anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 7

Background information

Please fill in your details in the spaces provided

Age (years) _____ **Sex** Male ☐ Female ☐ **Parent** (mother/father) Yes ☐ No ☐

How many children do you have? _____

Ethnicity (please tick)

☐ Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi
☐ Asian/Asian British – Pakistani
☐ Asian/Asian British – Indian
☐ African
☐ Black/Black British
☐ Black/Black British – Caribbean
☐ Other Black Background
☐ Other Asian Background
☐ Mixed – White & Black Caribbean
☐ Mixed – White & Black African
☐ Mixed – White & Black Asian
☐ Other Mixed Background
☐ White – British
☐ White Irish
☐ White European
☐ Other White Background
☐ Other Ethnic Background
☐ Chinese

Nationality _____

(e.g., British, Irish)

Experience working with children Years ☐ Months ☐

What is your job role?

What is your highest qualification? In what Subject?

_____

Appendix 8 – NVIVO 11